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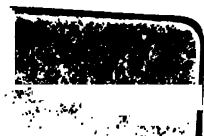
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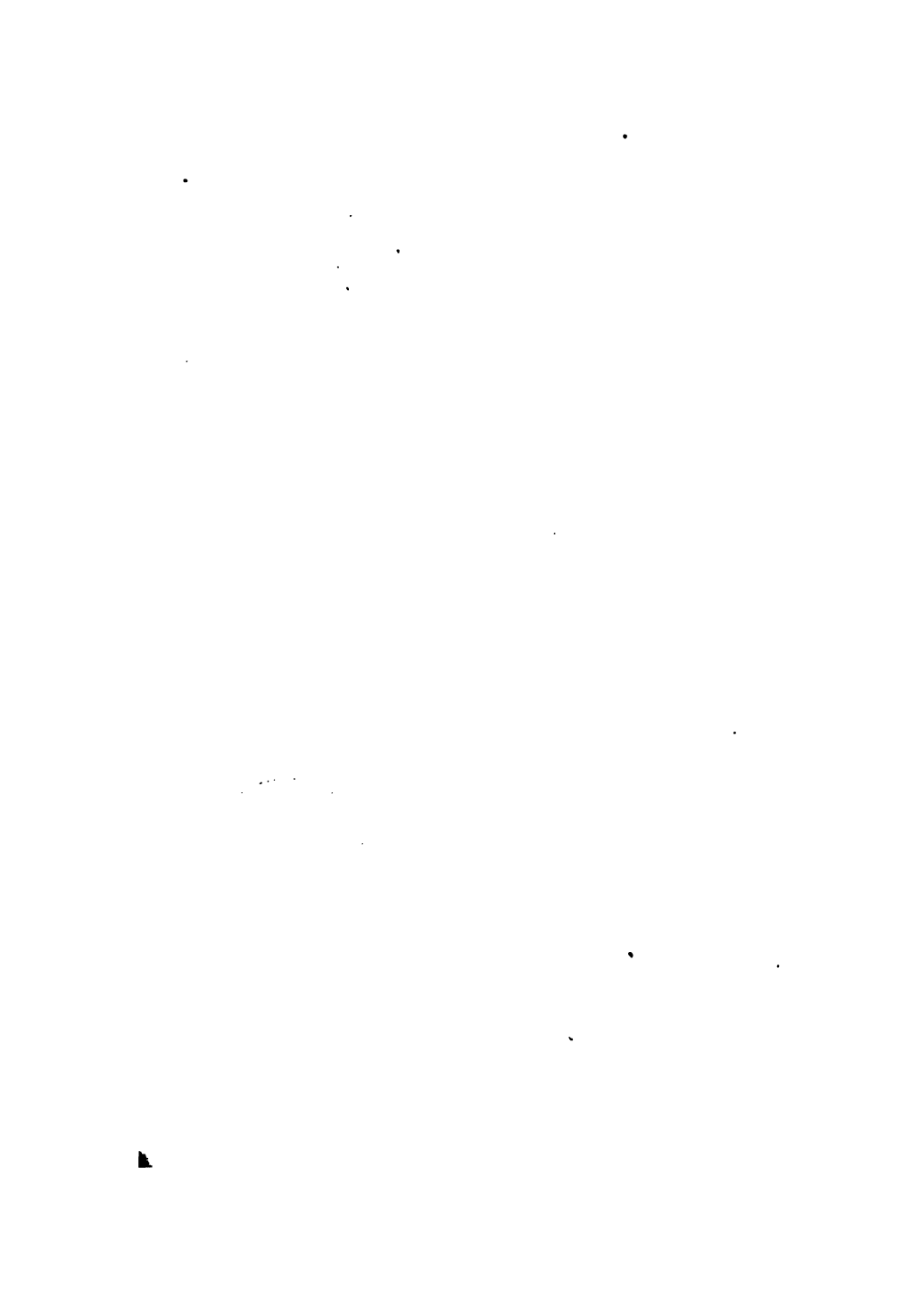


By the AUTHOR OF
"DOUGHT WE TO VISIT HER"



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LEAH:

A WOMAN OF FASHION.

BY

MRS. EDWARDES,

AUTHOR OF "OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?"

"SUSAN FIELDING," "STEVEN LAWRENCE," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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LEAH: A WOMAN OF FASHION.

CHAPTER I.

HER FACE.

THE Autumn night is chill, the third-floor rooms of Madame Bonchrétien's boarding-house are fireless, but Leah's blood runs like wine within her veins. Do rubies or sapphires best relieve the waxen whiteness of her skin? does a coronet or a spray best suit the graceful outline of her head? Engaged on such deep matters, practically solving questions of such moment before her

looking-glass, what bride-elect, aspiring to fashion, but must be above all changes of thermometer? Nay, is not contempt for bodily suffering one of the very first virtues that the great Juggernaut of modern times demands from her votaries and children?

A fair, low forehead, suggestive of kisses rather than intellect, with subtle-coloured hair, loose coiled; lips, rich at present in youth's first sweetness, yet with lines about them that age may render sensual or crafty, or both; a cheek that goes from bright to pale, from pale to bright too rapidly; and eyes that are at once the perfection and the mystery of the face. Eyes of the curious opal-yellow that Titian has once or twice painted for us, deep sunken, passionate, more fitted perhaps for hiding emotion than for betraying it, and curtained by lashes black as night. A nose not strictly handsome, by reason of the downward curve, indicative of race, towards

the tip, and still admirably characteristic—finely cut, expressive, and with the most transparent, delicately sensitive nostrils in the world.

Such is Leah Pascal at twenty, rough-hewn from Nature's hand, unshaped by milliners' devices and the applauding voice of fools into a woman of fashion as yet. Her figure inclines to plumpness, but in bone and structure the girl is slight, almost frail; a weight that any arms of average strength might carry easily. Her walk is supple; her voice mesmeric; her mind well furnished through extensive novel reading, French and English; her heart inclined towards good, if good happen to comprise diamonds, liveries, excitement, woman's envy, man's love: and if evil comprise the same—why, then, towards evil!

Such, I repeat is Leah Pascal, body and soul, at twenty; such the clay ready to the potter's hand.

For honour or dishonour shall this fair vessel be fashioned? Her story must give the answer. She will be married next week to a husband she does not absolutely dislike, and if this husband have the complaisance to live another twelvemonth, he will be lord over a hundred thousand pounds. So far the chances are in her favour; for a woman of her calibre, poverty, not riches, being the real impedimenta to virtue. The precious jewel of adversity is for the strong. Leah's moral qualities will thrive best lapped in soft silks, fed on costly food from costly dishes, and decorated for the world's admiration with the very finest sets of emeralds and diamonds that Bond Street can supply.

"There can be no doubt about it—the spray becomes me most, Deb. Still, if coronets are 'better worn,' as the jewellers say, I suppose I ought to take the coronet. One dresses to outshine other people, not to amuse oneself."

Deb is Leah's youngest sister, a small girl of ten or eleven, who, within locked doors, is occasionally permitted to play audience to the dress rehearsals of the bride-elect. She has been playing audience for more than two hours now, and her red nose and blue fingers bear evidence to the intense nature of the pleasure derived by her from the entertainment.

"Why not keep both, Leah? You could wear the spray when you dress to amuse yourself and the coronet when you dress to outshine other people, and if Jack Chamberlayne is so immensely rich as everybody says, a hundred pounds worth of diamonds, more or less, could make no difference to him."

"Jack Chamberlayne is not immensely rich yet, child. If Jack is lucky enough—if Providence directs things well," Leah corrects herself piously, "he will be rich twelvemonths hence. But twelvemonths hence is not now."

"No, indeed," says Deb, with a shake of the head. She is a very tiny, very fragile-looking child, slightly misshapen, poor little Deb, from her birth, and with the precocity of tongue, the mournful oldness of face and voice that not unusually go with bodily deformity in children. "I heard Madame Bonchrétien tell Miss Smith only yesterday that Mr. Chamberlayne had 'un toux qui sent le sapin.' I wish I knew what that that means—un toux qui sent le sapin?"

"I wish Madame Bonchrétien would attend to her own business," cried Leah, sharply. "If Madame gave her boarders rather fresher meat for dinner, and at the same time chattered less about their concerns, it would be better for all of us."

"And still I *respect* Madame Bonchrétien," says Deb, opening her grave, dark eyes, "because my dear M. Danton respects her, and says she is good of heart. Ah, Leah,

if you had only seen M. Danton sooner ! He has a picture just like you in his photograph book, and once when I asked him about that picture he turned white and looked so odd at me : however, it is too late now ! Nothing can be changed, of course, when people's wedding dresses are ordered, only it is such a pity Jack Chamberlayne isn't nice."

"One cannot get everything, Deb," answers the elder girl, "and I am sure you have no reason to say bad things about Jack. Look at all the toys and bonbons, look at the beautiful locket, real pearl and turquois, that he has given you."

"Oh, I know, and I like Mr. Chamberlayne in that sort of way very well, though not so well as Naomi does. Still, he is not nice, Leah. His voice is so husky, and you can always tell he has been smoking, and he has got red spots, and he dresses up like a girl, and drinks such *lots* of

brandy and water, and plays tunes on his chin."

Leah laughs cheerfully, not in the least disconcerted, it would seem, by Deb's highly coloured little picture of her future brother-in-law.

"Jack is not a beauty, certainly. Luckily no one ever judges a man by his face, Deb, and I shall have good looks enough for us both. As to his amusements—well, 'tis foolish, I admit, for a man to put on a bonnet and petticoats and turn his chin into a musical snuff-box, but better be foolish than wicked, as Bell says when she moralises about my future happiness. Jack can't read more than half a page of a novel without falling asleep, and as the doctors limit, or try to limit, his smoking, he must do something with his time."

"Oh, but you may easily be foolish and wicked too," says Deb, with her weird wisdom. "I have heard M. Danton say so. M. Danton

says there's no wickedness can come up to a fool's wickedness, and I am sure he knows more truth about every subject than Cousin Bell."

"Cousin Bell knows one thing," says Leah, leaning fondly over her well-stored trinket case. "She knows how to choose a bracelet! Putting aside Jack's diamonds, of course, Bell's bracelet will be the handsomest of all my wedding presents."

"And when you were poor, Cousin Bell never gave you anything, Leah, except one wretched garnet ring, do you remember, that wanted mending—and sometimes a dress or bonnet a little too shabby for her own lady's-maid! When you were poor, Bell Baltimore could only spare you her old cast-off rubbish; and now that you are going to be as rich as—that!" says Deb, spreading both diminutive arms wide, "Bell Baltimore will spend—oh, I dare say fifty,—five hundred pounds on you for a bracelet!"

"The way of the world," answers Leah. "Has not my godpapa, the Venerable the Archdeacon, sent me the most lovely church service, all silver and crosses and white velvet? Have not his two dear daughters (who I am sure would have cut me in the street a month ago) subscribed a plated salver between them? Has not everybody belonging to us given me something, even old Cousin Anastasia, in Yorkshire, who quarrelled with papa—not because he married a Jewess, but because the Jewess failed to bring him a fortune—twenty years ago? It's a good, Christian, charitable, uncalculating world, Debbie. Fall well on your legs as regards money, and see if every friend and relation you have will not rush forward and generously do his little best to steady you!"

"And fall off your legs, as regards money, Leah, what will all your dear friends and relations do then?"

"Ah, I have not come to that stage of

experience yet," answers Leah, "If poor Jack—if anything should happen to hinder us from coming into the Chamberlayne estates, I dare say I shall have many things to learn on the score of friends and friendship! In the meantime, I am all my bracelets and prayer-books and plated salvers to the good. Help me to put my fineries away—why, you look green with the cold, child, and there is the tea-bell ringing! Actually it must be nine o'clock. You don't feel very frozen, Debbie, do you?"

"Not ve-very, Leah," says the child, her teeth chattering, as she lets herself slowly down from the high chair on which she has been perched. "I would sooner be cold with you up here than warm down stairs with Naomi and the Fossils. And all the time you were dressing I've been pretending to myself that we lived, you and me together, not in a Paris pension, but a grand London house, with carpets all over the floors, and

fires in the bedrooms, and *our own* servants to wait on us. It makes such a difference, doesn't it, Leah, what you pretend to yourself?"

"You will not want to pretend when I am married, Debbie. You shall pay me as many visits as you like, and have a room of your own, and a little warm white bed, and a real theatre, with actors, oh, so big, to play with. You will be rare and happy then, Deb."

"If we could only have it all without Jack," says Deb, wistfully. "Oh, Leah, if you could have the big house and the velvet prayer-books (and the theatre with actors—so big—for me) and no Jack Chamberlayne!"

"If I could have the moon, Deborah! We must take the sweets and the sour together, as Fate sends them to us. Depend upon it, Jack will not get much in your way, or in mine either, by the time I have been married to him six weeks."

Deb shakes her head dubiously over this optimist view of newly-wedded happiness, but remains silent.





CHAPTER II.

THE PROLOGUE TO HER STORY.

WHATEVER economical shortcomings Madame Bonchrétien's boarders may be called upon, by the hardness of the times, to endure during the day, the drawing-room after-dinner fire goes a long way towards atoning for them.

Désiré, the hard-worked page in buttons, the solitary laquais of the establishment, has Madame's own commands to build up the drawing-room grille, high as hands can pile

it, immediately after the ringing of the first dinner-bell. And well does Désiré obey the letter of the order, not wholly without the incitement, perhaps, of occasional small bribes from the more chilly-blooded or liberal-handed of the boarders.

Poor dear old souls, male and female ; the Fossils, as Deb's sharp tongue has nicknamed them ; to whom Madame Bonchrétien's hospitality, at fifty francs a week, is now, in the winter of their days, a cold equivalent for home. What intrigues go on amongst them to get the snuggest place by the fire ; what feints and counter-feints to secure the easiest chair, the corner of the room that has the best reputation in respect of draughts ! Madame la Comtesse de Miramion, by virtue of her title, the "leading lady" in the house, habitually leaves the table before dessert (and in a cheap Paris pension even four dry almonds and a savoy biscuit go for something) in order that she may take sure possession of

her corner of the sofa. Major Macnamurdo and Mr. Pettingall, yearly boarders, whose united ages amount to about a hundred and fifty, begin their game of cribbage as regularly as the clock strikes eight every evening, so the two arm-chairs by the card-table are looked upon as theirs by right. But for the remainder of the places 'tis a matter of hard fighting—hard fighting in which quarter is neither given nor expected.

“I have lived under Madame’s roof fifteen years,” says old Mrs. Wynch, at once the terror and mainstay of the house. “I’ve lived under Madame’s roof fifteen years, and now, in my old age, she makes me pass my evenings on a straight-backed chair. That’s the way with the French. Pay ’em their money—I’ve paid Madame over seventeen hundred pounds, from first to last, and as soon as they think you have bled enough, they care less for you than we in England care for a dog.”

“I accord my ladies to tune their own

flutes," Madame will answer, in her voluble English. "Where one shall sit, where the other? I will that all the world should sit well. These are not of my affairs."

When Leah and little Deb enter the drawing-room the fire, as usual, is jealously guarded; several of the gentleman boarders, however, chancing to dine abroad to-night, even Mrs. Wynch has secured a position, about the warmth and comfort of which it is impossible to cavil.

She is a witch-like, curiously small old woman, gruff-voiced as a man, bent nearly double with years and infirmity, deaf as a post, bitter as gall; her attire, black cotton velvet and mock ermine, liberally besprinkled with snuff; her head-dress a little plate of lace and pink ribbons that would look coquettish on a blonde head of two and twenty.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Pascal," peering up out of her puckered old eyes at Leah's

shining beauty; "been trying on some of your jewels, I suppose, eh?" The morocco case containing the diamonds is still between Leah's hands. "I was younger than you when I married, just turned seventeen, and I had not an ornament belonging to me, except my wedding-ring. Girls made love-matches in my days. They didn't put themselves up for sale to the highest bidder as they do now."

"Love matches!" repeats Madame la Comtesse from the opposite corner of the fire. Madame de Miramion is an English woman by birth, but having spent her life out of England, she speaks her own language with an accent. This is a peculiarity of the Bonchrétien establishment. You perpetually seem to hear bad English about you, or bad French. No one ever makes use of the tongue he can thoroughly master. "Would the dear old creature have us believe that she was married for love? Ah, this is too strong."

The comtesse in her youth, fifty or sixty years ago, was a noted beauty and toast. She has white little hands, a delicate meaningless profile, an upright slip of a figure, even now; and even now she arranges herself for effect, rises from table or glances across her shoulder with an air, and has attacks of migraine for the sole purpose of coquetting with the doctor in a becoming nightcap. Between her and Mrs. Wynch wages deadly truceless war, barely veiled by the common decencies of civilization. Madame Bonchrétien has disposed their sleeping apartments on different floors, in different wings of the house. At dinner one occupies the head, the other the foot of the table. In the drawing-room the hearth-rug separates them. They have not shaken hands, they have scarcely addressed each other openly, during the last five years; and still they fight perpetually. Hang two old caged birds of the same sex a yard distant from each

other on a wall, and you will see very much the same kind of warfare carried on.

“Love matches! Madame Bonchrétien, I hope you hear the latest news? Our dear old friend would persuade Miss Pascal that the General married her for her beaux yeux.”

Madame Bonchrétien looks round from the table, where she is assisting her junior partner, Miss Smith, to pour out tea. Miss Smith is a poor meek-spirited down-trodden Briton, who never speaks above a whisper in Madame’s presence, and upon whose shoulders a great deal more than half the real work of the establishment falls. “Ah, my dear Comtesse, when we arrive at her age—eighty-six, I assure you, I have it from her conversation. Why, the General have been dead close on fifty years.”

“He did not survive the love-match very long,” says the Comtesse, with a laugh; the hardest, cruellest little ghost of a

metallic laugh that ever proceeded from a human throat.

The rest of the company smile. Old Mrs. Wynch glares round fiercely from face to face. "You seem mighty well amused, ladies, upon my word! Don't let me lose the jest, pray. I did not quite catch Madame Bonchrétien's last remark."

Bonchrétien, ready in all disputes between "these ladies" to precipitate herself boldly into the breach, runs across the room, a tea-cup in her hand.

"Let me present you your tea, Mrs. Wynch. We laugh because we have the heart light. The good prospects of our dear Mademoiselle Leah take us back to our youth."

"They take us a very long time off, then," cries the old woman, giving a withering look round at the circle. "We are all ancient, very ancient, here. It's said of your establishment, Madame—though you

won't tell me your jest, I'll tell you mine—it's said of your establishment that the undertaker's man calls as regular as the baker every day for orders. Why, there is not a boarding-house in Paris as full of mummies as this one."

Bonchrétien laughs with serene good humour. Bonchrétien can at all times laugh, weep, condole, congratulate, express any shade or phase of human emotion at a second's notice. Little Deb Pascal shrieks aloud, dancing about the room with delight.

"The undertaker's man calls for orders—Oh, Madame, is it to measure the ladies and gentlemen for their coffins? Have Lord Stair and papa been measured? I hope papa has—he *would* look so droll! Naomi, wake up, I have something good to tell you! The undertaker's man calls here every morning of our lives for orders."

Naomi Pascal, at present fast asleep in the warmest corner of the room, is, beyond

contradiction, the beauty of the family. Her cheeks are purest white and damask; her eyes luminous black, not dubious yellow like Leah's; her lips, nose, chin, all are faultless; not one irregular line mars the symmetry of the exquisite soulless face. Leah may be called singular, charming, piquante, irresistible, according to the taste of him who speaks. Every man, every woman who looks at Naomi makes use of the term, a beauty. She began first to hear that fatal word, beauty, in connection with herself when she was about two years old. She has heard it perpetually since; from servants, relations, acquaintance, from the very passers-by in the street. Now, at fourteen, her soul—so far as Naomi Pascal may be said to possess a soul—lives, moves, and has its being sustained by no other interest, quickened by no other motive, than her own charms.

Her constitution is flawless as her face.

She eats immensely, sleeps immensely, can, indeed, fill up all vacant or heavy hours of existence with one or other of these employments; and as to temper—well, I don't know that you could call Naomi Pascal's temper "sweet;" it would be juster to say that she is without temper of any kind, good or bad. Her placidity is marble-like as her smile, her heart. Salt tears in plenty have Leah and little Deb shed, bitterest heart-pangs known, while Naomi either dreamed, digested, or admired herself in the looking-glass. They have been motherless, with a cold indifferent father, have had to cope with poverty, and worse than poverty, ever since Deb can recollect anything. Naomi has slept, yawned, eaten, or tried on new ribbons through it all. Once only in her life, her sisters aver, has she known the taste of pain—the occasion when, with loud shrieks to earth and heaven for sympathy, she consented to have her ears pierced by

the jeweller; and even then the prospective vision of her own loveliness, enhanced by ear-rings, went far towards consoling her.

Beautiful, brainless, with a genius for sleep and food only equalled by her incapacity for suffering, what splendid materials for happiness, longevity, terrestrial success of all kinds has Naomi Pascal!

"The old ladies are going to fight—wake up, quick!" whispers little Deb, as Naomi languidly rubs the sleep from her lovely eyelids. There is no very great love between the younger Miss Pascals; but Deb feels that it would be base to let even Naomi miss the delicious excitement of one of Mrs. Wynch's battles royal. "Look at the Comtesse's face; look at Major Macnamurdo. Won't there be a row, just, before they have done!"

"Désiré," shouts Mrs. Wynch, a sudden glitter in her eye, "j'ai à vous parler." She has lived in Paris twenty years, but speaks

the most atrocious French that even the Bonchrétien establishment can produce; a French that "shaves the ears," as the Parisians express it. "Vous avez oublié de mettre le thé, Désiré. Beaucoup eau chaude, pas de thé."

This is more than Bonchrétien can abide. Madame is of the Gironde, originally, and not all the philosophy gained in her profession, not self-interest itself, can, under insult like this, quell the fiery Southern blood within her veins. She darts back to old Mrs. Wynch's side, her swarthy cheeks afire, her eyes kindling.

"Vous avez oublié de mettre le thé, Désiré," repeats the old woman, making a feint of handing her cup to the servant, but seeing all the time, as clearly as she ever saw anything in her life, that Madame, not Désiré, stands beside her.

"Indeed, Désiré forget nothing of the kind," shouts Bonchrétien, in her ear. "I

serve Désiré the tea myself; one spoon each person and two for the théière; not a house in Paris where you 'ave equal thé with mine. But there is no pleasing you, Mrs. Wynch. I have worked my 'art for fifteen years to please you, and in vain. Nothing please you."

"Make that remark again, Madame, will you? I am rather hard of hearing."

"I say that nothing please you, Madame Wynch, and I say it once more. You are ingrate."

Mrs. Wynch totters to her feet, her diminutive, shrunken figure shaking with passion; she peers with her unearthly white old face full into the excited coffee-coloured one of Madame.

"Ingrate! you call me ingrate! What were you when I first came to you, when you lived in the Rue Lafitte; five lodgers, up three pairs of stairs, and used to give them soup-meagre six days a week and bully

for an entrée? Whose money pulled you through? Who bought the commissaire out of the house when your sister died? Who helped you to pay young Arnaud's college debts? You have had seventeen hundred pounds of my money, Madame—I have your receipts to show for it—and now that you have risen in the world I get the worst room in the house, draughty, sunless, neither carpet nor bell-wires. I might fall ill in the night and lie there and die before I could make you or any of your servants hear me. You don't care whether I live or die. There was a window left unmended in my room five nights in the middle of January, and as to black beetles——”

“This is enough, this is enough, Mrs. Wynch,” cries Bonchrétien, whose face has gone through many curious evolutions of colour during the old woman's accusation. “I bear much when I remember of your age, and the long time we are friends, but when

you speak of what does not regard you—of black beetles in one of my bedrooms, I look round at the salon, at these ladies, I make my appeal to the society—is it true or false?”

The society is mute. Mrs. Wynch is the terror of every inmate of the house, male and female; every one in turn has been made to writhe, as Bonchrétien writhes now, under the lash of that scorpion tongue. And, as long as the contest remained personal, every old lady present (for convenience, I enumerate the two dear old cribbage-players among the old ladies) would unhesitatingly have thrown her weight upon the side of Madame. But the moment wider questions are opened, more momentous issues trenched upon, public feeling veers. Talk of draughts, unmended windows, and black beetles, and not a soul present but is converted on the spot into a fellow-creature and a boarder.

“Madame la Comtesse,” begins Bonchrétien, appealingly.

Madame la Comtesse has lifted her handkerchief, the corner with the embroidered coronet displayed, to her peaked, high-bred, old nose, and pretends to be asleep.

"Major Macnamurdo, I ask you. Have you ever seen——?"

"Fifteen two, fifteen four, and two for his heels, six. Upon my word, Sir, 'tis as close a game as you and me have ever played," cries the plausible old Irishman, conveniently deaf.

Madame turns away, desperate, towards the other side of the room. "Mrs. Amiral Tom-son," she exclaims, "I confide myself to your response. You hear of what Mrs. Wynch accuse my establishment. Is it true or false?"

Mrs. Amiral Tom-son—I like, with Bonchrétien, to give her her full, accentuated title—is an immense old woman, with drooping eyelids, a widow's cap, yellow curls, and a voice. Even Désiré, the pert Parisian

gamin, picked up during one of the revolutions out of a gutter, and trained by Madame into a page, even Désiré, who, in his time, has quailed neither at Prussian nor petroleum, quails before the majestic British presence of Mrs. Amiral Tom-son.

"If you really ask my opinion, my dear Madame Bonchrétien," she replies, with sepulchral amiability, "I consider that there *are* black beetles in this establishment ; many !"

"Many !" is repeated by the fickle voice of public opinion round the room. Poor little Bonchrétien sinks into a chair, beaten.

"And when next you use that word 'false,' Madame," goes on old Mrs. Wynch, upon whom most of the by-play has been lost, "when next you use the word 'false,' I would advise you to study your company a little first. I shall leave your house to-morrow morning." She threatens this, on an average, about twice in every three weeks. "I know

a boarding-house, Rue Boissy, where you can live for forty-five francs a week, and get three entrées at dinner."

"Forty-five francs a week ! Three entrées!" ejaculates Bonchrétien, clasping up her hands heavenwards. "Of what, I ask the society, of *what* those entrées are they made?"

"And I shall pack up my things and go there. I'll never stay under your roof after what has passed between us. But I'll give you a bit of good advice before we part, Madame. Be more choice of your company before you use that word 'false' so freely. What are all of us here?"—her keen old eyes making a circuit of the room—"what are all of us, what are our lives but false? False gilding and fineries about us." Madame's salon is liberally adorned with looking-glass, velvet, and bric-à-brac, all of more show, perhaps, than intrinsic value. "And upon ourselves false hair, false teeth, false colour, false figures—false everything."

"She have put on her cap de travers. She must be removed to a house of health," ejaculates Bonchrétien, white as a sheet. "Madame la Comtesse, Mrs. Amiral Tomson, I implore you make no attention to her frenzy."

"And you,"—turning to Leah, who, with little Deb, stands an amused spectator of the scene—"you falsest of all, young and handsome though you are. If you don't know what I mean, ask your conscience for an answer when you walk up to the altar on your marriage morning. Now I have said my say."

And so speaking, and shaking still in every limb with rage, Mrs. Wynch totters forth through a side-door from the drawing-room, and is seen no more.

"And there are who pray to grow old, who regard the white 'airs as a mercy," cries Bonchrétien, piously. "May I live so long

only as I think well of my creatures, as I am at peace wid all men. My dear Miss Pascal, you forgive her? She is incapable. When the mustard mount to her nose she know not what she says."

But Leah is silent. Since the first hour of her engagement she has been literally overwhelmed with sugared falsehood of all kinds, after the manner of brides-elect. Old Mrs. Wynch in her passion has struck the first true chord to which the girl has had occasion to listen, and it vibrates with curious power on her heart.

"Ask your conscience for an answer when you walk up to the altar in your marriage morning."

The words may not unfittingly be taken as a prologue to this history. While Mrs. Wynch was still speaking, the door communicating with the staircase opened quietly, and unseen by any one save little Deb, a new actor appeared upon the scene. A new actor,

destined from this moment forth to play a leading part amidst the *dramatis personæ* of Leah's life.





CHAPTER III.

OUTSIDE, IN THE COLD.

“**M**ONSIEUR DANTON — my own
dear Monsieur Danton !”

Deb’s poor small figure flashes across the room at lightning speed. She takes both M. Danton’s hands, with the lovely shamelessness of her age holds up her eager lips for M. Danton’s kisses.

“What, Deb, my sweetheart, and are you really glad to see me ?”

Danton is a man just the other side of thirty, of middle height and slight compact

frame; his face dark and clear as a Neapolitan's, with black, close-cut hair already showing some tell-tale streaks of white, and a pair of steady, hazel-grey eyes. A resolute face, I should say yet delicate, not the faintest trace there of that "soupçon of the bull-dog" so essential to the hero of modern romance, but rather about brow and jaw a fineness of outline going near to effeminacy. Has not one of our greatest thinkers laid down the axiom that no face wearing the stamp of genius can ever be without this touch of the effeminate?

Leah looks at him, and, as far as love at first sight is possible in any nineteenth century heart, falls in love. He looks at her, and, as far as such a sensation towards a handsome girl is possible in any man of thirty, feels repulsed, exceedingly.

"Monsieur Danton, a day earlier than we attended him! This is a pleasure, in truth."

Bonchrétien runs — agile little French

women of fifty really do run, and without upsetting chairs or tables—across the room ; she seizes both his hands with effusion. “Has M. Danton dined, supped? Can she get nothing, positively nothing, for M. Danton? Ah, then,” with a waive leading him forward towards the fire, “she will no more withhold him from the happiness of saluting these ladies.”

“And now you must speak to Leah,” cries Deb, when M. Danton has gone the round of the room, and shaken each chill “Fossil” hand in turn. “She and Naomi came back a fortnight ago yesterday. Leah,” bringing him to her sister’s side, “this is M. Danton, *my* friend.”

He bows, his eyes fixed upon her face, a world of admiration in their expression ; she returns the salutation by a smile, frigid as ice itself. With such instinctive insincerity do men and women meet each other from first to last.

“Although I have not the pleasure of Miss Pascal’s acquaintance, I cannot feel that I am a stranger to her,” remarks Danton. His mother was English, he speaks our language without accent, and still the voice rings of his father’s country. You must hear one of these liquid Italian voices speaking perfectly pure English to realise the charm of the combination. “Through Deb’s agency we are already friends, I hope?”

Leah’s eyes on this give him a glance—soft, shy, meant to slay; but Danton receives no wound. He knows the practised coldness, the practised warmth of eyes like hers so well; has surrendered to them in his time so absolutely, has paid the price of them so dearly.

“Deb is a little chatterbox. I can assure you, M. Danton, there are very few of your secrets that Deb has not told me. She

has no scruples at betraying the confidence of her friends."

"In other words, Deb will be a woman one day. Does the woman live who would not betray her friends' secrets if the friend were rash enough to entrust her with them?"

"You must have had a very unfortunate experience in such matters, Monsieur Danton."

"An unfortunate, rather than an exceptional one, Miss Pascal."

They have known each other one minute and a half, and already their talk borders on intimacy. Whether fate hold love or hatred in her hand for them, the necessary affinities are here for either; they "get on." Perhaps to get on after ninety seconds' acquaintance, is a more necessary condition of future hating than of loving.

"Most of our dear friends have so few secrets to betray," says Leah. "I should

always be delighted, I am sure, to betray any one if I got a chance, but I don't. I cannot even remember what my dear friends have said five minutes after I say good-bye to them. And so their insipidity, not my honour, makes me faithful."

"You are candid," returns Danton, looking steadily into her face—a face that, with all its beauty, possesses very sparingly the master beauty of candour.

"I have a bad memory, simply," says Leah, with a laugh. What a charming little noiseless laugh hers is, displaying what marvellous teeth, bringing into play what dimples! Danton remembers its very counterpart—teeth, dimples, and all—and curses it in his heart yet. "Given a bad memory, nothing really saves trouble like the truth."

"Do you read much, Miss Pascal?"

"Only novels as yet. In future I shall have to dabble in politics, I'm afraid. They

say you want leading articles for dinner parties."

She sighs; Danton knows the sigh by heart as thoroughly as he knows the laugh; and the word "dinner-parties" becomes a confession.

"That sounds bad. When a young lady begins to talk about politics we know—we, who stand outside in the cold—what it is likely to mean."

"And pity her a little, I hope?" says Leah, turning aside so that, for the first time, he can see her profile; not an absolutely perfect one—what woman worth loving ever had an absolutely perfect profile? but a "point," nevertheless.

"Pity her!" repeats Danton, in a graver voice than heretofore. "Aye, Miss Pascal. The chances are she wants pity sorely enough, and somebody else, too."

Leah is silent. In the hands of a practised coquette silence also can become a

point, and Danton turns from her to Deb—Deb who, listening to their talk and watching their faces, is in a chaos of doubt as to whether the two human creatures she loves best on earth mean to hate each other or not.

“And so you have been telling my secrets, Debbie! I shall be careful how I confide in you for the future, especially on the subjects nearest my heart. Now, in what particular matter have you been playing me false, I should like to know?”

He lifts the poor little deformed girl in his arms, and begins to whisper to her so softly that Leah alone can overhear.

“Have you been telling of my weakness for Mrs. Wynch, Deb; or letting the world know that Mrs. Amiral Tom-son frowns upon my suit? Deb, if you said one word about Mrs. Amiral——”

“You silly, silly Danton,” says the child, resting her face against his cheek. “Mrs.

Amiral Tom-son, Mrs. Wynch, indeed, for sweethearts of a handsome young man like you !” Upon whomsoever Deb loves she bestows flattery as boldly as she gives battle to those she dislikes. “ If I have ever told one of your love secrets, Sir, it was about the photograph—the picture in your red book, you know—that I always said was so like Leah.”

If the thrust strike home, as the thrusts of these terrible children generally contrive to do, not a muscle of M. Danton’s face betrays that he has been made to wince.

“The photograph in my book? Ah, I recollect—and it *is* like your sister, slightly. Who would have given you credit for such keen observation, Deb? The portrait in my red book has a sort of half look of Miss Pascal.”

Again he reads her face steadily ; and Leah’s eyes, not wont to quail before the

expression of any amount of masculine admiration, seek the floor.

"Nothing is more dangerous than to tell people they are like unknown photographs," she remarks, biting her lip to withhold it from a quiver. "We are all so profoundly satisfied as to our own charms that the mere suspicion of sharing them with anybody else is galling."

"If you saw the photograph Deb talks of, you would, I think, find it hard to take offence, Miss Pascal."

And Leah, with all her vanity, overflowing, insatiate though it be, has sense enough to know that the speech is not a compliment.





CHAPTER IV.

“THEATRE !”

I MUST glance back for a moment at the past, just to show you the ground upon which Leah and Danton meet, ere I proceed further with their story.

It was about three months before the present time that Colonel Pascal, a sprightly, well-rejuvenated widower, unencumbered by visible children, first took up his quarters in the Rue Castiglione. A widower of fifty-five, unencumbered, good-looking, suffi-

ciently easy in circumstances to engage Madame's first floor bedroom with the south aspect; and to drink his champagne at dinner a great deal more freely than any other boarder took the vin compris of the table. What a chance was here for every widow and spinster in the house! Mrs. Amiral Tom-son at once took her new black satin and Irish point into common wear. The unmarried ladies surpassed each other in those bows and frills and hair-lappets by which the sex, at a certain age, lays its nets for unwary man. Even old Mrs. Wynch, her fourscore years well struck, would set her cap a little more jauntily on the top of her palsied head, and send the Colonel round her snuff-box "*avec mes complimong au Monsieur le military,*" by Désiré at dessert; whilst Madame Bonchrétien added daily to the bill of fare some little made dish or another of a nature likely to please Monsieur le military's taste. So things went on with

smiles, hopes, interchanges of politeness, and made dishes for a fortnight ; then— then came the payment of Colonel Pascal's first bill, and with it the shattering of many a fondly-nurtured female hope and illusion.

“ Economy, but 'tis an economy of candle-ends,” confided poor little Bonchrétien to these ladies. “ So much off service, so much off bougie, his bedroom fire must be compris, he will buy his wine out, and pay me what you call cor-kage. Allez, if it were not for the *désastres* of my country, I would say to Colonel Pascal take your walk. And now there comes a child to be nourished at half-price, and ten against one another child next week ! We know not the beneath of those cards yet. Ah, my dear ladies, but what a man ! If it were not for the *désastres* of my country—— !”

The child was Deb, sent away sick from the cheap Boulogne boarding-school to which the Colonel's paternal heart had consigned

her and Naomi during a protracted London campaign (matrimonial and otherwise) of Leah's. You may imagine the welcome she received, poor Deb, first from Bonchrétien, who regarded all children belonging to boarders in the same spirit as she regarded dogs and caged canaries, and who had agreed to nourish this one with the smallest possible margin of profit to the establishment. Next from the old ladies who had weakly imagined Colonel Pascal unencumbered; lastly from Colonel Pascal himself.

He loves none of his motherless girls over much; he loves nothing in the world overmuch save Colonel Pascal; but the handsome persons of the two elder ones are satisfactory to his pride, wholesomely suggestive of hope, too; handsome girls, in the course of nature, marry, and are got rid of. But Deb, misshapen, sickly Deb, who never can be handsome, never marry,

and yet who, the doctors assure him, is not in the least more likely to die than other children !

—"How d'ye do, my dear? All these illnesses and journeys are a sad expense to me, very sad. If you could only have waited till the holidays. Now, I do hope you will be a very good little girl, and give no trouble, and make no noise, and keep a great deal in your own bedroom."

This was Colonel Pascal's reception of his youngest daughter.

And then it was that Danton and Deb became friends. Unlike "these ladies," Danton had taken an instinctive dislike to Colonel Pascal from the very first evening when that gentleman aired his long dyed whiskers and jewelled hands and intimate acquaintance with dukes and marquises at Madame's table. Nor was the feeling unrequited. "The person called Danton, an out-at-elbows kind of medical student, I

believe. Worst of these foreign boarding-houses, obliged to sit at table with gentlemen you cannot bow to in the street." So Colonel Pascal would say, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, with drawled elliptic contempt, after the manner of his tribe.

But the sight of Deb, sick, solitary, neglected, overcame all Danton's repulsion towards the father; I should rather say he lost sight of the father wholly, in his interest for the child. Poor Debbie was stowed away at night in some dark ground-floor cupboard, side by side with one of Madame's servants, a cupboard devoid of light or warmth, plentifully supplied with sewer gas and black-beetles. At dinner she got such odds and ends of vegetables or inordinately tough drumsticks as had been passed by and rejected by all the full-grown boarders in turn.

Sewer gas and drumsticks for a weak little ultra-nervous child, needing bountiful air

and sunshine, milk and mutton chops! Deb grew greener and smaller, her lean limbs, leaner; the rings around her eyes darker. At last, without preamble or apology, Danton spoke to the father, spoke as a medical man and in the very plainest possible professional terms. Colonel Pascal treated him with the cool kind of contempt you might assume towards a quack doctor who was endeavouring to "make" a case for the lining of his own pocket. His little daughter had never been actually robust, but at present, thank God, was stronger than usual! He was indebted to Mr. ?—eh—ah—Danton, for his solicitude; but if he, Colonel Pascal, or his family, required medical treatment, one of the first physicians in Paris was Colonel Pascal's oldest friend; and—exactly—Colonel Pascal was sure Mr. Danton's delicacy would require him to say no more.

Then Danton betook himself to Madame

Bonchrétien, to Miss Smith. He appealed to them as women—Madame was a mother herself—as Christians; they were hard, both of them, as the nether millstone. Colonel Pascal expressed himself satisfied. If the dear child's papa was satisfied, 'twas enough, surely, for *their* consciences. At last, finding sentiment powerless, Danton turned to science as an ally. He spoke to the women of light and its effects on all living organisms; spoke of the laws of nutrition; showed them how a frail little child might starve on diet that sufficed for elderly men and women; finally, growing warmer, and forgetting his audience in the interest of the subject, he made use, accidentally, of the word Bioplasm.

It took effect like a bullet-shot. Nothing reduces women of a certain class to obedience like the timely employment of speech beyond their comprehension.

"I have cared for you as a mother,

Monsieur," said Bonchrétien, whimpering. "I have mended you, nursed you, saved your money. And it has come to this. You charge me with such infamies to my very face!"

"It will be the ruin of the establishment," cried meek little Smith. "What stranger would come to a house of which an inmate, *and a doctor*, says such cruel things?"

But it ended by their promising to put Deb into an airier bed-room, and to give her milk and mutton chops.

"Don't talk of the father," said Danton. "The man is no father at all—would be relieved by the child's death. If you are put to extra expense, I will pay you. Yes, Madame, *I*. I owe you a long bill, I know, of which you are good enough not to remind me, but I have my watch and shirt-buttons still out of pawn. Oblige me by buying, on my account, the tenderest loin of mutton you can find when you go to your butcher's,

this morning, and make the child eat three chops a day, at least."

After this fashion was Deb pulled round. As she grew stronger, Danton, in his scanty moments of leisure, would take the little girl out with him for such walks as she had strength for; walks, most of them, through the very unfashionable quarters of the city where his professional engagements lay, but which to the child, were simply elysian. So the weeks went by, and so their friendship, a feeling amounting to a perfect passion of gratitude on poor Debbie's side, was cemented.

"I always hoped you and Leah would like each other, Monsieur Danton," she remarks, looking searchingly from one face to the other with her dark wise eyes. "But now that you have met, you are nearly quarrelling already. Perhaps it is just as well though—under the circumstances."

Something in the child's voice, or in a sudden glance she gets from Danton, causes

Leah to blush over cheek and brow ; Leah, who so seldom commits herself by the betrayal of emotion, who so seldom has any emotion to betray ! She crosses quickly over to Madame de Miramion's sofa, and kneeling down by the old Comtesse's side, opens her morocco jewel-case.

" I want you to help me, dear Madame de Miramion. You have such perfect taste in everything to do with dress, and I am really embarrassed, the embarrassment of riches ! Mr. Chamberlayne gave me another present to-day," lowering her voice as she pronounces her lover's name, "some diamonds for my hair—and the jeweller has sent two sets for me to choose from. Now do advise me which to take."

The Comtesse draws forth her double gilt eye-glass. (None of us at Madame Bonchrétien's use spectacles ; we are afflicted with weak sight, or far sight, or near sight, we are none of us blind from age.) She turns

the diamonds over between her delicate old white hands with pious effusion. "Ah, my sweet Miss Pascal, what taste! Mr. Chamberlayne's generous devotion is only equalled by the perfection of his artistic sense. You must put them on before we can judge of the full effect; but first let us admire the excellence of the workmanship. Mrs. Tomson, Madame Bonchrétien, have you seen the last exquisite present sent to dear Miss Pascal?"

The ladies, at the word "present," all assemble round. Magnificent! splendid! sweetly pretty! such an elegant design! yes, and the mountings so chaste! These, and kindred notes of admiration, rise in a chorus round the happy bride-elect. Remembering the circumstances of the case, the death-in-life that must await her as Jack Chamberlayne's wife, you might almost liken this chorus to the one which surrounds and encourages the Hindoo girl-widow ere she mounts the fatal pyre. A prejudice more or less, a difference

in creed and colour, and where would be the difference? Where, at all events, the moral superiority of the one sacrifice over the other?

"I should choose the *tiarar*, myself," says Mrs. Tomson, in her grand bass. No one knows in what quarter of the globe the late Admiral Tomson picked up his wife. By dint of very rich silks, very heavy jewels, and strict taciturnity, she contrives to pass muster tolerably well, in some circles. Still, superfluous "r's," uncertain "h's," do at times awaken suspicion as to the lady's origin. "With a regular line of face, there's nothing looks so imposing as a *tiarar*, for the dinner wear especially."

"But, unfortunately, I have not a regular line of face," says Leah.

She makes the modest speech in a tone sufficiently loud for M. Danton to hear it; but Danton keeps silence. He is looking over a heap of letters that Bonchrétien has

handed to him, and is apparently too much engrossed by their contents to notice what the other occupants of the room are about.

"Not a regular line of face? Oh, my dear Mademoiselle, you think too little of yourself."

"For my part, I have always considered Miss Pascal's line of countenance as *Grecian*."

So the feminine chorus once more swells round the victim—the willing victim of the coming sacrifice.

"I should decide upon whichever ornament is most the mode," advises Madame de Miramion. "In themselves, both are incomparable. The question is simply one of mode."

"I should take whichever I looked hand-somest in, Leah," cries little Deb, edging her small face in beside the fine solid ram-part of Mrs. Amiral Tom-son's skirts.

"And I," says Naomi, "would choose the one with the biggest diamonds." And

the girl's beautiful eyes glisten, doubtless with honourable ambition for her own future, as they rest upon the shining loot of her successful elder sister. "I would look through the stones in each, one by one, and choose the most valuable. You could have them reset afterwards."

"Mademoiselle Naomi has reason!" cries Bonchrétien, into whose business like hands the trinkets have now passed. "But, as far as I see, they are of equal value. I count the same number of stone to each. Ce cher Monsieur Chamberlayne determined it should be an embarrassment of taste alone."

"Then I suppose my only alternative is to have another grand trial of effects," says Leah. "I have gone through five, at least, to-day, in the vital interests of the jewellers and modistes!" And, thus speaking, she moves across to the mirror above the fireplace, and with a little air of weariness,

charmingly acted, prepares for the rehearsal.

Impossible for Danton not to notice, or pretend he does not notice, her now. She is exactly before his eyes: so close that he can smell the sweetness of the flowers she wears, so close that the folds of her dress almost touch him.

It is an amber brown silk, well worn (Colonel Pascal practises the rigidest economy as regards his daughters' personal expenditure), a silk matching the colour of her eyes and hair, and fashioned absolutely without ornament. Leah values the beauty of her own softly-undulating figure too well to allow milliners to disguise it by frills, puffings, and flounces. At her breast she has a few autumn violets, in her hair a knot of yellow ribbon: she raises her hands above her head to unloose this ribbon, and the sleeves of her dress falling back, display the roundest, whitest pair of arms that ever

led the better sense of man astray since the world began.

Danton glances at her; in the glance takes in every detail of this loveliest living picture that glows before him, then falls to the perusal of his letters with redoubled attention.

"A man ignorant of the commonest decencies of life," thinks Leah, as she watches his reflection in the mirror. "To read—to pretend to read—with me before him! Monster, how I hate you; but you shall suffer, you shall suffer for it!"

She fastens in the spray of diamonds; the ladies are enchanted. She replaces it by the tiara; the ladies are in ecstasy. Even the two old gentlemen pause over their cribbage to admire and pay compliments. Danton, monster that he is, goes on quietly with the reading of his letters, and says nothing.

"And you, Monsieur Danton," cries the Comtesse, in her suave, well-bred voice. Danton is no favourite of Madame de Miramion's. Old Mrs. Wynch, little Deb, poor Miss Smith—the unpopular, the weak, the down-trodden, are Danton's friends. Madame la Comtesse, Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, Colonel Pascal, all the big-wigs and garnitures of the house, dislike, and in their hearts fear him. "M. Danton, we know you to be an artist by predilection. Let us have the benefit of your opinion."

He looks, not at Leah, but at the Comtesse. "I shall be happy to give Madame de Miramion my opinion on any subject that she likes," he answers, but without rising, without putting aside his letters.

"We want your opinion on *me*!" cries Leah; and impelled by I know not what instinct of coquetry, what resolve of conquest, she places herself before him with a courtesy and stands there, an expression of mock-

modesty on her downcast face, as though awaiting his approval.

“By what strange roads thought travels!” As Leah Pascal stands thus, two pictures—widely different ones, yet interlinked together by some subtle chord of colour, moral or physical—two pictures, both of mercenary, heartless beauty, rise before Danton’s vision.

The first is of the greatest artist of all modern times, of Rachel in her prime. Danton was a little child when, for the sole time in his life, he looked upon Rachel’s fatal loveliness, listened to Rachel’s fatal voice; yet, even at this moment, his blood stirs at her remembrance. She is playing Adrienne Lecouvreur. With the concentrated, withering scorn of which Rachel alone was capable, she overwhelms the princess in that highly-wrought fourth act, where Adrienne first becomes cognizant of her well-born rival’s shame. The fire of the sunken eyes outgleam the diamonds on her grand uplifted

arms. The guttural Jewish accents pierce to the listener's marrow by their very quietness, the absence of all rant or violent theatrical emphasis. It is not acting, it is life. No clever artist is there, tearing emotion to rags, with due traditions of the stage. A woman, injured, loving, hating, vents her passion fearlessly, almost silently, and the crowded theatre sits hushed, trembling: savans, men of letters, critics, and the little child in the stalls, alike passing from pity to rage, from love to hatred, from indignant scorn to satiated vengeance, as the vibrations of Rachel's eloquent voice bear them along. She softens, and a sob goes through the house. She steels herself once more; with bent head, folded arms, and steady, glittering eye, bides her time, and every feverish pulse beats quicker, every heart shudders. She speaks! with frenzied passion, pent-up ferocity, raising her tragic hands in anathema above her shrinking rival, her

small head held erect, her nostrils swollen, and every spectator present rises to his feet, and almost mad with excitement, finds relief in prolonged and deafening plaudits. Danton, livid, transfixed, his childish limbs bathed in cold sweats, his soul carried into regions beyond his intelligence, applauding wildly, senselessly, frantically with the rest.

So much for the first picture.

The second is of a fair young English girl of nineteen. A marriage ring, untarnished yet, is on her left hand ; in her right she holds a bracelet and smiles, as our first mother may have smiled under the first temptation. "Eugene" — turning to her husband with those eyes of hers—golden-brown eyes like Leah's—placid, ingenuous —"to think that any one should be so generous anonymously. A bracelet set with all these rich diamonds for me!" She is near to him, like Leah ; her breath warms his cheek ; her arm——

"Monsieur Danton—Monsieur Danton!" cries Debbie, "you look like Lazarus in the big picture at the Louvre. Are you ill or dreaming, Sir, or what?"

And the child steals her thin little hand, with the ignorant sympathy of her age, into his.

Danton stoops and kisses her.

"I look like Lazarus, do I, Deb? What a wise soul yours is—to detect the charnel-house air so quickly! No, I am not ill, my dear, nor dreaming either, only seeing visions of fair faces, of which Miss Pascal's"—bowing low to Leah—"is the crowning one."

Leah colours; but whether with pleasure or annoyance she herself knows not. Every look, every word of this man's might pass for flattery, in the ordinary relations of men and women; and yet Leah knows by instinct that she was never less flattered in her life.

"You are complimentary, Monsieur Danton, but vague. I want a practical criticism just now."

"Upon yourself, or upon your diamonds?"

"Upon my diamonds, of course. Do you really think my tiara becomes me or not?" looking at him as few men have ever been looked at by Leah Pascal's eyes without receiving their death-wound.

"I should say *not*," answers Danton, as coolly as though he were giving his opinion on the shape of a decanter or the pattern of a carpet. "Of the diamonds, as diamonds, I am no judge. Their effect on Miss Pascal's head is grotesque—simply."

"Grotesque!" comes in many-toned indignant chorus from the old ladies.

"Monsieur Danton probably does not know the value of diamonds like these. We can well understand that," remarks Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, pompously.

"Monsieur Danton would not be Monsieur Danton if he could think like other people on any subject," says the Comtesse, in her malicious little high-bred whisper.

"Monsieur Danton is reserving all his admiration for the other ornament, the adorable spray," cries Bonchrétien, creamily peace-making as usual. "My dear Miss Pascal, if you would allow us to see."

But Leah has swept the diamonds angrily from her hair, has replaced and clasped them in their case. A flush, lovely as day-dawn, born of wounded vanity, stains her face. "It is a great deal too late for you to be up, Deb, and you too, Naomi. Go to bed this moment, both of you. Do you hear me, Deb, go!" for the child lingers, caressing Danton's hand with her cheek. "Another night you shall not stay up, listening to all this sort of nonsense."

"Not stay up, Leah?" cries Debbie, her great eyes filling. "And there are only

seven more evenings left before your wedding! How can you find it in your heart to be so cruel?"

"Ah, there is the question," says Danton, but so low that only Leah hears him. "How can she find it in her heart to be so cruel?"

"And Mr. Chamberlayne has you half the day, and the horrid dressmakers and milliners the other half, and I hate people being married!" cries Deb, with more fire than coherence. "Oh, Monsieur Danton, don't you go and be married next."

"Not very much danger of that, Deb," says Danton, lightly, and still with a certain change of voice that recurs afterwards to Leah's memory.

Mrs. Amiral Tom-son and the Comtesse exchange glances.

"No *possibility* of it, Sir, I should trust," remarks the former with trenchant emphasis.

"There are situations in life—um—haw—situations"——

"‘Dreadful exigencies in which morality submits to a suspension of her own rules in favour of her own principles. Burke.’ The quotation has assisted you, I hope, Madam?"

Danton turns his back to the fire, his face to the foe, a position that his enemies (most of the people in the house are his enemies) know means fighting; a smile, whose serenity is that of all conscious virtues enthroned, lights up his handsome southern face.

"A very dangerous maxim, indeed," mumbles Mr. Pettingall, as he rises with stiff limbs from his cribbage. "A very dangerous experiment ever to suspend the sacred rules of morality."

Mr. Pettingall is an old gentleman of seventy-five or six, white-cravated, white-haired, venerable; cashier once in a too

well-known Indian bank, says rumour, a bank that failed fraudulently, and who during the past twenty or thirty years has been holding church-door plates, officiating as amateur churchwarden, and generally supporting and collecting money for the Protestant interests in Paris. An extraordinarily rigid old gentleman; Spartan-like towards all human frailty—especially human frailty undraped by wealth—a hot and undisguised opponent of Danton's. "A red Republican, like his namesake, Sir A man who has been seen to walk arm-in-arm *with actresses* on a Sunday, and who has not got a fixed principle belonging to him." Thus will Mr. Pettingall speak, with upliftings of the virtuous old eyebrow, and shakings of the venerable old Tartuffe head.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pettingall," cries Danton, good-humouredly. "What was your last remark? The sacred laws of

morality? I was unfortunate enough to lose the drift of what you said."

But Mr. Pettingall has no desire to cross swords openly with his antagonist. The stiletto, not the sword, is the weapon in favour in Madame Bonchrétien's house. Eleven o'clock strikes; and exchanging many a whisper, many a Lord Burleigh nod as they go, Mrs. Amiral Tom-son and the Comtesse sail stately from the drawing-room, the two old ladies in coats and waistcoats following. Another three minutes, and Danton is left alone—Danton and poor grey Miss Smith, silent, cold, unnoticed in her corner behind the tea-table, as is her wont.

The smile dies from his face. 'Tis a sad face, now that you see it absolutely without mask—a face with more hollowness about the temples, more lines around the mouth than Danton's two-and-thirty years of life should warrant. He stands with folded

arms, with a blank despondent expression in his eyes, staring absently into the dying embers of the fire.

"Sit down, my dear, and let me fetch you your slippers," says a kind little twittering voice at his elbow. "And do make yourself a cigarette, Monsieur Danton. None of the old ladies will come back any more to-night."

Miss Smith is—no, I should be sorry to guess, even approximately, at Miss Smith's age. She is young enough to wear her own brown hair in ringlets; old enough to call Danton "My dear," to get him his slippers, and carry him his tea before he rises in the morning, without scandal—one of the humblest, least selfish, most oppressed creatures in the universe; not lovely of face, not bright in intelligence, and weak enough of heart . . . ah, let us respect the poor soul's secret, as religiously as does the object of it himself. *Is* there anything so super-

lately ridiculous in the devotion of a forlorn and loveless woman like Miss Smith to a man a dozen years her junior? For the life of me I cannot see it. She knows that Danton cares for her, in the way of love, about as much as he cares for Sappho, the tabby cat; and if, knowing this, it is her pleasure to bow down to him, slave for him, receive his very neglect as a favour, who shall blame her? Viewed in the light of reason, there are few forms of worship, perhaps, that do not exhibit some trifling leaven of absurdity.

“*Cette pauvre chère Smeet !*” Bonchrétien will say, pityingly. Madame herself is not without a lurking tenderness for her handsome boarder—no, a *tendresse*; there is a wide distinction between the two, a *tendresse* stopping infinitely short of either worship or servitude. “*Cette pauvre chère Smeet*, and her little artifice—artifice, what you say, worked wid white thread! But all English

old maid the same. Quiet as the *petit St. Jean* outside, and within!" And here Bon-chrétien spreads her ten fingers wide, and rolls her eyes in their sockets, in pantomimic representation of the volcanic fires that devour "cette pauvre chère Smeet's" inner woman.

"Sit down, my dear Monsieur Danton, and rest. I will be back with your slippers in a moment."

She wheels the most comfortable arm-chair in the room before the fire, flies up to the third floor for his slippers; I regret to say, helps him to remove his boots on her return—Danton should be above permitting such slavery, but he is not; then takes her own place, modestly, at three or four yards' distance, and sits waiting till it shall be M. Danton's pleasure to speak, while M. Danton folds for himself and begins to smoke a cigarette.

"No smoking allowed," is placarded all

over Madame Bonchrétien's house. And Danton smokes cigars in the salon, pipes in his bedroom, cigarettes everywhere. What revolutionary crime does Danton not commit against every established law and morality of the establishment?

"You are looking rather pale, Monsieur Danton," commences Miss Smith, after a long pause. "I do hope you have taken to your flannels, Sir? The autumn is setting in chill."

He is watching the tiny blue tobacco clouds curl upwards above his nose, and makes no answer. Nineteen times out of twenty it does not even occur to Danton that he need answer "*cette pauvre chère Smeet's*" remarks.

"And your socks. I felt so unhappy when I found you had gone without any woollen socks. But, as Madame packed your portmanteau herself, I was afraid to say anything."

Still no answer. M. Danton, with the same abstracted air, smokes his cigarette to the end, manufactures and lights another, Miss Smith, the while, sitting perched upon the edge of her chair, meekly waiting. At last, "You know what I went over to London for?" he begins, abruptly, and without turning his face towards his companion.

Yes, Miss Smith knows. A sad, sad errand; a most tragic——

"I found her," he continues, shortly, "and with less difficulty than I expected."

"You found?"—Danton is absolutely, unnaturally quiet; but poor little Smith is all a-tremble. You can see her sparse ringlets quivering with agitation in the fire-light. "You found?—oh, Monsieur Danton!—my dear, dear Sir!—what agonies you must have been enduring!"

He smokes through his cigarette placidly, flings the small remaining atom into the

embers, then takes out his watch and prepares to wind it up. Whatever agonies he may have been enduring in London, M. Danton, for certain, is suffering nothing in Paris. So judges Miss Smith, who knows him well; so would judge ninety-nine out of any hundred ordinary observers who watched his demeanour at this moment—but the hundredth one might judge otherwise!

“I tell you this, Miss Smith, because I know, good, kindly soul that you are, how everything connected with me interests you. And I mention it for another reason. Mr. Pettingall, I can see, has spoken. The people in this house know the story of my shame, every one of them.”

“Oh, M. Danton!”

“Know it, or imagine worse—it matters little. Well, if they plague you about the result of my journey to England, simply give them this answer: ‘Monsieur Danton has

seen the woman who desired reconciliation with him, in London, and she is well.' You understand? Not one word more or less."

And with this it would seem that Danton's confidences are over. Taking out his tobacco pouch, he begins to fold himself a third and final cigarette, and as he does so sings; every cloud or trace of a cloud vanished from his handsome face,

" Oh, ma maîtresse,
Oh, mes amours,
Fuyons ensemble,
Et pour toujours !"

His singing voice, like his speaking one, has the true Italian ring, the liquid penetrating timbre of those Southern voices whose faintest tone is music. A great many people in the world hate Danton passionately; a good many love him; but over lovers and haters alike that voice of his holds sway.

"The fellow can do one thing—sing," even Colonel Pascal, about the bitterest of his enemies, will allow.

Poor little Miss Smith sits watching him curiously, just the faintest degree in the world shocked. To his Southern levity, his quick transitions of mood and spirit, she is tolerably used. But that even he, Eugene Danton, can sing reprehensible French songs about "*Ma maîtresse*," and "*mes amours*" in the same breath with which he has spoken of that tragic errand of his to London, does take her aback.

"'Oh, *ma maîtresse*, oh, *mes amours*.' Talking of '*mes amours*,'" he has risen to leave the room, and turns in the act of opening the door, as if the thought had suddenly struck him, "What about this girl with the diamonds and the yellow eyes, Colonel Pascal's eldest daughter?"

"Miss Leah Pascal. She is to be married

on the 18th to an exceedingly rich gentleman, Mr. Chamberlayne."

"Unfortunate man! I pity him from my soul."

"You will pity Miss Pascal most when you see them together. Mr. Chamberlayne is a miserable little worn-out creature, Sir, with death written on his face, and in spite of his riches he dresses like a groom, and people *do* say—drinks! And yet that girl—a handsome girl too——"

"Not ill-looking certainly," Danton admits, with a half yawn.

"But a coquette—ah, M. Danton, take care of yourself, a coquette!—flirting (on the brink of marriage though she is) to desperation with Lord Stair; liking Lord Stair, I believe, in her heart, and all the time as ready to walk up to the altar with Mr. Chamberlayne as though he were an Adonis."

"Of course she is," answers Danton,

lightly. "Adonis ungilt would have no market value whatsoever now-a-days as a husband.

'Oh, ma maîtresse.' "

He runs upstairs, the reprehensible refrain still upon his lips, and on the landing of the third floor encounters the girl with the yellow eyes and the diamonds face to face.

Leah wears no diamonds now ; her silk dress is replaced by a plain white wrapper, that discovers the beauty of her slight round form to the utmost. Her bright hair, freed from pads and pins, ripples below her waist. She holds the traditional midnight taper in her hand, and gives the traditional little midnight start and run on seeing Danton.

"Theatre," he decides, promptly. "The whole effect is planned, well planned." Does he like her the less for this? Does a man

of thirty ever like a handsome girl less for the strategies by which she compels his admiration?

"You are late, Mademoiselle."

"I—I have just been in to kiss my little sisters." Leah and Naomi Pascal kiss each other about twice in three years, or seldomer. "I—oh, M. Danton, I *am* so glad to have a chance of saying a word with you before I sleep! I do so want to thank you."

Danton makes no reply. The game is too completely in her hands for him to seek to interrupt it.

"If you knew how seldom a word of truth comes to me; if you knew, amidst all the buzzing of foolish flattery, the *good* it did me to hear that word 'grotesque' from your lips! I am sure I shall never, never care for diamonds again."

"In the shape of a tiara, I am convinced you will not," says Danton. "Those stiff,

regular lines set above a face of which the charm is—not regularity, are a mistake in art. The very last mistake Miss Pascal would be likely to commit.”

“Irregular in feature, grotesque, artificial ! I wonder what truth there can be left for you to speak and me to hear.”

The taper trembles in her hand, her eyes droop so that, perforce, he notices the length and blackness of the lashes against her cheek.

“What truth there can be left for me to speak and you to hear ?” says Danton, very low. “If you give me leave, Miss Pascal, I will tell you.”

Leah turns from him quickly and takes shelter in her room, the door of which stands opportunely open. She walks to her glass, holds up the light, no trembling of the hand now, and looks at her own great fairness as it stands there mirrored before her.

“Poor M. Danton !”

This is what Leah Pascal thinks, with the delicious exultant flutter that only gratified love or gratified vanity ever brings to human hearts.

And “Poor Mr. Chamberlayne !”

This is what Danton thinks, with no flutter whatsoever, either of vanity or love.

So the tools, edged to a nicety, are in their hands ; so the game, to be played out to the death in future times, has fairly opened.





CHAPTER V.

ENTER—MY LORD STAIR.

IT is Madame Bonchrétien's habit to acknowledge that Providence has crowned her widowed lot with many mercies; of these, George Francis Lord Stair, fifth Viscount of that name, is, beyond dispute, the topmost glory, the herb of grace, the sweet marjoram of the salad.

"I have, of my habitués, the widow of

an admiral ; Mr. Pettingall, one of the oldest inhabitants of Paris, and a churchwarden of the Temple ; and—Milor Stair !”

Thus speaks Madame when bent on luring new-comers into her circle, and not in vain. On more than one occasion has she seen flutterers acquire decision, sceptics converted on the spot, by the magic of that one word—Milor !

Milor does not pass his life, as you may believe, in the Rue Castiglione. In London, Monaco, Vienna, the face of George Francis Lord Stair is periodically familiar. But the Rue Castiglione is the nearest approach to a home that he possesses ; an empty portmanteau or two, bearing his noble name in black letters, reside there always, his bills go there, the more respectable of his letters go there, and absent or present, he has never, during the past five years, been out of Madame Bonchrétien’s debt. Has she

not just cause to boast of Milor Stair as a resident?

His acquaintance with Leah Pascal began a fortnight ago; the acquaintance that, if Miss Smith may be credited, already bids fair to endanger Jack Chamberlayne's peace; but Leah Pascal and Lord Stair are both adepts in the dangerous art of "safe" flirtation; and whatever we do well we do quickly!

Leah, being handsome, engaged, and rich—prospectively, Lord Stair thought it worth his while to lay siege to her vanity within twenty-four hours of his introduction to her. I say vanity, advisedly. Lord Stair never troubles himself about women's hearts. Vanity and hunger are the only human motive powers that his creed acknowledges. Lord Stair being a notorious Lovelace, a Lovelace scarcely better known for his conquests than for his own invulnerability, Leah resolved to subjugate *him* even before

she had lifted her eyes to his face. And both have succeeded fairly well; with what ultimate gain to themselves or to society we shall see later on.

That the flirtation has multiplied Leah's future chances as a woman of fashion is beyond question; Lord Stair, bankrupt and crewhile outlaw though he be, knowing Everybody, of the half world as of the whole, in London. Nor can the sincerity of his attentions (I was nearly writing his intentions) be questioned. He gives up his club of an evening that he may sun himself in the yellow light of Miss Leah's eyes. He allows Colonel Pascal to walk arm-and-arm with him about the Rue de Rivoli and the Bois. He has even borrowed a hundred pounds of the lover, little Jack Chamberlayne, who is at present in Paris, awaiting his marriage. Whenever Lord Stair is thoroughly in earnest on any subject, you may be quite sure that he will borrow

money from some one as an initiatory proceeding.

“We missed you terribly, last evening, Milor. Mademoiselle Leah essayed her diamonds, the last delicious gift of ce cher Monsieur Jack, but we had not got Milor to assist us with his taste.”

Leah and Lord Stair are dawdling over their late breakfast in the *salle-à-manger*, while Madame Bonchrétien, serviette in hand, nightcap on head, flattery on tongue, flits nimbly to and fro about the room. To-day is a field day in the establishment; Mr. Chamberlayne invited in state to dine with Colonel Pascal; and the whole house is in a fever of preparation. Even the two supremest people in Madame's universe, the bride elect and Milor, are forced to eat their breakfast at a side table. The centre one groans with piles of glass, artificial flowers in disorder, mock-silver dish covers, and *épergnes* still untwisted from their

tissue paper ; all the raw material that eight days later shall grace Leah's wedding feast.

"Yes, indeed, we missed you," says Miss Pascal, with one of her side looks. "I almost think I miss Jack when I have to spend the evening among the old ladies unrelieved. Not that poor Jack is amusing, but he makes a noise, and that is something. By-the-by, you and papa dined with him last night, Lord Stair. What did you all do?—bore yourselves and each other very unmercifully?"

"I am always bored except when I am in one place now, Leah," is Lord Stair's answer. He began playfully to call her "Leah" on the first day of her return to Paris, and the joke stands now; even Mr. Chamberlayne having to accept it with as good a grace as he can. "But the party, as a party, was a success. Chamberlayne gave us, as he always does, an excellent dinner, excellently served,

and had some capital fellows to meet us.”

“And afterwards?”

“Afterwards, we had a pleasant little game of loo. I am ashamed to say how much your father and I came away to the good, Leah. Chamberlayne lost, of course. A man who is winning life’s real prizes, like Chamberlayne, may be content to exhaust his bad fortune upon loo and écarté!”

Lord Stair sighs, and pushes away his plate. A man evidently without morning appetite, but whether from the state of his *morale* or his stomach, it would be hard to guess; impaired digestion producing symptoms so closely resembling those of overburthened heart or conscience. A sallow, fattish man, forty on his last birthday, says the ‘Peerage,’ bald, with thin reddish moustache, quite red hair, and an ugly obliquity in his small grey eyes, that, perhaps, if he were not a Viscount, might be called a squint. And still he is distinguished-looking; tall, erect—

Lord Stair was in the Guards in his youth—and in spite of his chronic insolvency, one of the best-tailored men in Europe. His teeth are white and well-shaped, his hands white and well-shaped, though somewhat overfat like his figure; his manner of entering and leaving a room, putting on an opera cloak, or holding fans and bouquets, as near perfection as anything mortal can be. Of his mental qualities it would be harder to speak; seeing that to men he seldom talks at all, while to women he talks in whispers that the world (happily for the world) hears not. He tells stories rather well, of a certain Rabelaisque flavour, and short; and he is always well posted in the last scandal of the hour, political or social, but coy of revealing it. A man who impresses you with the notion that he was born to succeed in some one or other of the world's great charlatanries—diplomatic, stock-jobbing, private inquiring, or the like. And who *has* succeeded . . .

no, these are not the pages wherein to chronicle Lord Stair's past life.

"If he has brought so many people to grief," said Leah, once—some of the old ladies, watching the dawning flirtation, thought it a duty to advise the girl as to poor dear Lord Stair's reputation—"If he has brought so many exemplary people to grief, destroyed the happiness of so many virtuous households, all I can say is, that the happiness of virtuous households must rest upon very shaky foundations. My peace of mind endangered by Lord Stair? Why, he is the very ugliest man out—bald, red-haired, a squint, and the age of papa. Oh, I don't care about the 'Peerage,' all books tell stories—the age of papa! He takes a fatherly interest in my affairs, he calls me 'Leah,' as he calls Naomi 'Naomi,' and seems disposed to be kind to Jack and me after we are married. Dear, good old harmless goose that he is!"

Which innocent little outburst of credulity

must not, however, be received as Gospel. Some persons are disingenuous on principle, some from habit, others from fear. There is a fine natural spontaneous insincerity about Leah Pascal, an instinct, impelling her to falsehood, just as instinct impels the mole to burrow or the otter to dive. She dissembles because she must. Remembering the two strains of blood that mingle in her veins—blind forces, shaping thought and action just as peremptorily as they mould lips and chin—I don't know that the idiosyncrasy can be marvelled at.

Lord Stair pushes away his plate after he has swallowed a couple of mouthfuls; nor does Miss Pascal show a much robuster appetite. A girl of twenty should be able to breakfast heartily at any hour, off any materials, but Leah has all the fastidious caprices, the inchoate likes and dislikes of a genuine woman of fashion. With well made little plats and Chablis she might eat.

These half-cold cutlets, this most ordinary of Bordeaux, re-corked after yesterday's dinner, tempt her not.

"Nous mangeong de pease ong pease," growls Mrs. Wynch. The old woman, in a snuffy camisole and with her wig awry, is breakfasting alone at a corner of the big table; a position from whence Bonchrétien, Désiré, and Miss Smith have in vain tried to dislodge her. She pays as well, pays better, than Colonel Pascal—pray, are her bougies, her service, "compris?"—would not move from her own place at breakfast though a hundred Colonel Pascals were going to give mock-fine dinners to mock-fine friends. "Madame Bonchrétien, Désiré, Rose—where are you all? I say we eat from worse to worse. This fish smells. At the pension in the Rue Boissy you get fish, fresh fish, two entrées, and a dessert for breakfast. But that's the way when you stay too long in a place. I have lived under

Madame's roof fifteen years, I have paid Madame over seventeen hundred pounds, I can show her own receipts for them, and this is the way she treats me now. Votter poissong pooh, Madame! But the French are all alike, all alike."

She sits muttering anathemas, and shaking her poor old palsied head over her well-kept "poissong," while Madame, gay as a grass-hopper, flits hither and thither among her artificial flowers and épergnes, unheeding. That Mrs. Wynch is not likely to leave, Bonchrétien knows. Her complaints, her threats, are perennial, like her bursts of passion; but she stays.

"She return always to cook at my stove," Bonchrétien will say, in her wonted style of idiom, and with an expressive shrugging of the shoulders.

Where, at eighty, shall a forlorn human soul, bereft of all nearer ties of kith or kin, find new shelter? Mrs. Wynch will not

leave the Rue Castiglione till the undertaker carry her thence; and if she did, Bonchrétien could bear the loss. Mrs. Wynch's money tided the Bonchrétien family over a good many dark shoals in days gone by; but Madame has risen in the world now, and her memory, like that of some other successful persons, is short. Besides, does not Mrs. Wynch's income die with her? Who can feel sympathy for a cross-grained exacting old woman of eighty, who has been selfish enough to sink her capital in a life assurance?

Mrs. Wynch goes on muttering anathemas, her head bowed down over her plate; Madame is busy among her épergnes; Milor, in the distant corner, sits whispering into Leah's ear; whispering, it may be conjectured, about some subject of unusual interest, if one may guess from his companion's downcast eyes, the smiles, half reluctant, half approving, that play round

the corners of her lips. To these, just as the big clock above the mantelpiece strikes twelve, enters Danton, hat in hand. Danton's hours are not the hours of the ordinary Anglo-Parisian. At six, winter and summer, he has his early cup of tea. Before seven he is at work, either abroad in the city, or in his own room, according to the season of the year. At noon he breakfasts, or dines, as you choose to call the meal, and *not* upon cold cutlets and overkept fish. From Madame down to the lowest scullery woman, not a functionary in the house but cares for the comfort of this "out-at-elbows medical student" more than for that of all the other boarders put together.

"Danton! What, you have come back, have you?" cries old Mrs. Wynch. "I was beginning to think we had got rid of you for good. You will not find the house improved in any way, Sir, nor the company neither, during your absence."

"And your cough, Mrs. Wynch?" he asks, bending over the shrunken old form, kindly. "Why, you are looking charming—ten years younger than when I left."

"Get away with you!" cries the old woman, but a look of something like pleasure brightens over her crabbed face. "Ten years younger, indeed! Who could look younger on such a diet? I know what my relations will say when I return to England." She is always talking of England and her relations, but has seen neither for twenty years. "'Is that you, Lavinia?' they'll say. 'Why, where are your good looks? where's your ong-bong-pong?' I was a well-preserved, well-nourished woman, Danton, when first I came under Madame's roof."

Bonchrétien, at this, looks round with a dangerous eye from her work, and Danton, who probably knows the storm-signals by dark experience, hastens to ask Mrs. Wynch

why the breakfast is not placed on the long table as usual? Has Madame got an addition to her guests, or what?

"Madame's guests are going to see company, Danton; that's what it is. You and I, who pay like the rest, may be made comfortable or uncomfortable—that don't matter to Madame! The French are all alike. You remember Pascal, don't you?—Colonel Pascal? A man with a good deal of sham jewelry and sham talk? Well, he has got a grown-up daughter here, now."

"Mees Pascal is in the room," shouts Bonchrétien, in an agony, across a pyramid of piled-up chairs. "Mees Pascal is at breakfast beside Milor!"

But Mrs. Wynch, deaf at all times, is never so deaf as when Madame Bonchrétien attempts in earnest to make her hear.

"A grown-up daughter, and a handsome girl too. And she is going to be

married. Her sweetheart will dine here to-day."

Bonchrétien breathes again. Considering the speaker, it might have been worse. If only one could be sure that this were all!

"Sweetheart! When I was young, girls *loved*. I made a love-match myself—a captain in a marching regiment; not sixpence between us. I went over the world with him—my commanding officer, I used to call him; and he died a general. He had no diamonds to give me as a wedding gift, I can tell you; but we loved each other; we had youth and health and high spirits. . . But now—Danton, shall I tell you what Miss Pascal's sweetheart is? The French have got the exact word for such men, as they have got plenty of the original article. He is one of these petty cravies" (so does Mrs. Wynch pronounce the term *petit crevé*). "I wish Colonel Pascal joy of the

match. A handsome girl of twenty, and a petty cravy like Chamberlayne for a husband!"

Happily, at this moment, Danton's breakfast enters, and Mrs. Wynch leaves off; it may be hoped, unheard by Leah and Lord Stair, whose murmured conversation in the distant corner of the room still continues.

"Mr. Danton is—a hanger-on in some shape of the house, I believe," remarks Lord Stair. "A relation, or admirer, I think some one told me, of our good Madame Bonchrétien's.

He noticed the flutter of Leah's eyelid, the sudden flush on Leah's cheek, when Danton entered the room five minutes ago, and so would sneer down any possible rivalry without delay. The two men, though living under the same roof, meeting daily, hourly, for nearly three years past, have never been more than potential enemies till this moment

—this moment, when Leah's coquetry brings them, at once and for ever, into sharpest collision. Women can seldom be thrown closely together without drifting into friendship or hatred. Men can wish each other good morning for half a lifetime with no other feeling than that of absolute indifference. "Danton—Danton? Ah, to be sure! lodges in the same house with me—plays the piano—half-headed sort of fellow, with ideas. Was to have been a parson, they say, but could not digest the Thirty-nine Articles; then a doctor, but turned scrupulous as to pills and black draughts. His wife, I am told, preferring bread-and-butter to conscience, ran away from him one fine day. Remarkably sensible of the wife." This would have pretty accurately summarised Lord Stair's opinions; if, indeed, he ever troubled himself to entertain any on the subject of his fellow-lodger. "A man, naturally, with about three inches of brain;

lucky as to tailors and posture-masters. Fool and knave in him about evenly balanced. Far too much lactic acid in the blood." This would have been Danton's summing up of George Francis Lord Stair.

"A hanger-on, or admirer of our good Madame's." Leah continuing silent, Lord Stair thus proceeds. "And, upon my word, I envy Mr. Danton his *bonnes fortunes*. While the rest of us starve on cold cutlets, Mr. Danton gets all his little plats sent hot and steaming from the kitchen."

The tone, rather than the words, imply contempt; and Leah—so influenced is she already by Lord Stair—feels half ashamed of her "conquest" of last night. The feeling is succeeded, almost before it has had birth, by one of those sharp revulsions to which women of her nervous febrile type are ever liable. Looking across the room, her eyes encounter Danton's: he is just sharing a savoury ragout with Mrs. Wynch, and a

smile of goodness—of bonté, I mean; we have no equivalent for bonté in English—lights up his dark face like a sunbeam. Their eyes meet; Danton bows coldly, as a man would bow to any acquaintance of yesterday, and Leah blushes in her very soul—a little also on the cheek, her companion notices.

Until this moment the girl has regarded Lord Stair as the most glorious of her conquests. Jack Chamberlayne, as a prize matrimonial, is well enough. Was not half London, and afterwards the whole of Scarborough, fighting for him—mothers, daughters, aristocracy, commons, alike—when her yellow eyes (a little aided, perhaps, by the strategies of Cousin Bell) carried him off? But it is difficult to feel proud of Jack Chamberlayne, personally. Leah has only to appear at the Bois or at a theatre, with Lord Stair, to be at once distinguished. “Lord Stair!” so people, she feels, *must* speak of them. “And who is his companion?—who is that beautiful

woman to whom he is devoted?" Never among her slaves—and she has had slaves since she was fifteen—has she numbered one so redounding to the glory of the moment, the glory dearest to vanity, as Lord Stair. And behold! she blushes, with shame, over herself, over their intimacy, over all that, not five minutes ago, she gloried in! Gifted already with the prescience any genuine feeling confers, she sees herself suddenly—as Danton sees her. Jack Chamberlayne, to whom she is sold; Lord Stair, who is to be the house friend of Jack Chamberlayne's establishment; them also she sees, with a vision not her own. If at this instant the chance of freedom could miraculously come to her, honest love for her portion, and the happiness honest love brings with it, no silks or diamonds, no fashion, no Lord Stair!—

"My dearest Mees," says Bonchrétien's creamy voice over her shoulder. "If Mees

could accord me one instant of attention? Milor will pardon us. I have here," handing Leah a sheet of paper, "the names of our little society, as we are to dine."

Leah glances carelessly over the list. "The society will be all right, Madame, as far as I can see; only please make one trifling alteration. Just put Mr. Chamberlayne between Mrs. Tomson and Madame de Miramion; and I dare say Lord Stair, under the circumstances, would not mind taking me? Yes, that will do better now. Mr. Pettingall and Naomi will make the number even on our side of the table; and Deb—oh, poor little Deb, in the corner there, away from every one!"

"Mees Deb sit in her corner of predilection," says Bonchrétien. "Her chair is next M. Danton's. Mees Deb would rather fail of her dinner than of him."

"M. Danton?" repeats Leah, indifferently—as though she had not spoken of Deb

purposely to lead up to his name! "By the way, which is M. Danton's place, Madame? I do not see his name on your list."

Madame gives her eyes a roll, pregnant with meaning, in the direction of Danton; then, lowering her voice confidentially, "Small chance that M. Danton will be of the society," she explains. "When M. Danton returns to Paris after a month's absence, who shall count upon him? A student in rags, of the hospital; a dancer, half-starved, of the theatre; the first one he meets, and who has not the piece of twenty sous in his pocket—dines with Danton at a restaurant. Ah, that is so!" Bonchrétien shrugs her shoulders pityingly. "Danton is Danton! No changing him."

"There will be twelve at table as it is, Leah," remarks Lord Stair, in his slow undertone. "Surely, you would not run

the risk of an unlucky thirteenth, upon so auspicious an occasion?"

For a moment or more, Leah seems to vacillate; then, abruptly, she returns the paper to Madame Bonchrétien's hand, rises, and walks to the other end of the room, Lord Stair watching her.

That the girl has taken a sudden fancy to Danton's handsome face he suspects—a fancy! Lord Stair's imagination could not, by possibility, soar higher in the regions of love than this. That it will be a "fancy" widely differing from any sentiment she feels, or ever can feel, towards himself, he is certain. Also, that there is not the remotest risk of its imperilling her fidelity to the Chamberlayne estates. The question is, how to make this fancy, love-fit, call it as you will, work best into his, Lord Stair's own game. For that he has other intentions than the mere pastime of the moment, you may be sure. Lord Stair does not walk arm-in-arm

down the Bois with Colonel Pascal, has not borrowed a hundred pounds from Jack Chamberlayne, for nothing. Leah is to be next season's reigning beauty, a twelve weeks' wonder in the Row, a notoriety, eclipsing all the other "peccadilloes of all Piccadilly," and with Lord Stair for her slave—slave, guide, mentor, and most implacable tyrant! It is not the first time he has chalked out, matured, and brought to the bitter end, a precisely similar scheme.

To become the fashion a woman will sell her soul alive. This is one of Lord Stair's pet beliefs. Curiously enough, he holds another—that a woman has no soul to sell; which, to say the least of it, is contradictory!



CHAPTER VI.

PRINCE CHARMING AT HOME.

“**M.** DANTON, I have a favour to ask of you.”

She stands before him with the loveliest flush of shame upon her face ; her hands clasped together, her eyes raised timidly, beseechingly, to his. Very handsome she looks thus ; infinitely handsomer than he gave her credit for being last night. Her skin, that Danton had a suspicion would prove sallow by daylight, is, he discovers,

without flaw ; velvety, mellow in tone as the petal of a Bengal rose, and of texture as delicate. Her hair, figure, hands, all surpass in reality the picture his memory had stored of them. And her voice—never, surely, had woman, even a Hebrew woman, a voice more instinct with fine native melody than Leah Pascal's !

And he is repulsed by her still ; repulsed, yet potently attracted. Amidst such wild contradictions do passions, not “fancies,” take their rise.

“Surely Miss Pascal need never ask a favour of any man,” he answers, getting up from the table and moving a step or two in the direction of the door.

“Because it is impossible for me to be refused ?” she returns, gaily.

“Because it is impossible that you can have a favour to ask. You have only to command.”

“And you to obey ? Very well, M.

Danton. I command you to dine with us this evening at seven. Papa has asked our friend Mr. Chamberlayne to dinner, and we wish all the people in the house to look upon themselves as our guests."

"You will have a sufficiently large party without me."

"But if I *ask* you, M. Danton?"

"I have only just returned to Paris, Miss Pascal. My hours are not my own. The first friend I meet in the street——"

"I know. Madame Bonchrétien told me all that. The first student in rags of the hospital, the first dancer, half-starved, of the theatre. But I consider that we have as good a claim as students in rags or dancers half-starved, and I will not accept the excuse. Are you engaged for this evening—yes, or no?"

"I am not engaged, formally."

"And you will join our party? I com-

mand—I mean . . . it would give me such pleasure if you will.”

After a second or two of silence, “I will promise to come readily, on one condition,” answers Danton. Madame all this time is holding Milor’s ear captive, with silken flatteries, Mrs. Wynch is almost choking herself over her ragout. (Grudge not the old soul that ragout, reader ; Nature does but leave this one poor pleasure for our solace, at the last.) “I will come, readily, if you will answer a very simple question. What is your object in asking me ?”

“My—object ?” she stammers, her eyes sinking to the floor. For her age, Leah Pascal’s experience of a certain showily-varnished sort of human nature is considerable. She knows nothing, either by theory or practice, of a nature like Danton’s, and already she fears him, hesitates ; is uncertain whether truth or falsehood will best allure him to her feet. “I hardly understand you,

M. Danton. Papa has invited Mr. Chamberlayne, and we hope to spend a pleasant evening, and——”

“What is your object?” he repeats, looking at her with barely-concealed impatience. “Let us tell each other the truth, Miss Pascal, as far as we can, from the beginning. It will save complications in the end. Why do you wish me to witness Mr. Chamberlayne’s happiness?”

“I don’t know that there is any very special happiness to witness.” Thus much Leah manages to reply, with tolerable self-possession, but her lips quiver; her heart beats, as no declaration of love—she has listened to several—ever caused it to beat in her life before.

“And you ask me for my own good, then?” he persists. “Honestly and truly, you believe that I should not show much greater wisdom by staying away?”

No coquetting with this man; try as one

will. Love may be got from him ; sooner, perhaps, than could be wished. There will be no trifling in the transaction. A Jack Chamberlayne for one's diamond supplier ; a Lord Stair for theatres and public exhibitions, generally ; a Danton, to play at sentiment with, and befool—Never ! For good or for evil, for loving or for hating, Eugene Danton is thorough, and Leah Pascal, actress by nature though she be, artificial through every tradition, every example of her life, recognises this thoroughness and already bows before it.

“If we only did what was wise, we should do very few things that are pleasant, M. Danton ! But, I dare say,” she adds lightly, “Madame Bonchrétien is right. There are much stronger attractions for you elsewhere than any poor little dissipations we can offer—if I only knew.”

“If you only knew. Ah, Miss Pascal, if we only knew things that are hidden from

us, I should not have returned to Paris till your wedding was over, for certain."

She stands a second or two, irresolute, after this avowal, for an avowal of a kind it is, then turns from him without a word; and Danton, quietly taking up his hat, walks away out of the room and out of the house.

"A très bong coor," says old Mrs. Wynch, looking up at length from her plate. "I know your father and he don't like each other, Miss Pascal, nor my lord, neither—how should they? Danton's an honest man." Bitter things have transpired since those roseate summer evenings when Désiré used to bear Mrs. Wynch's snuff-box to "M'sieur le Militairy," at dessert. Send him her snuff-box! The old woman now cuts M'sieur le Militairy dead, if she chance to meet him on the stairs. "What do you think, Madame?" this she shouts, with emphasis, to Bonchrétien. "I say Danton's

an honest man and true. I don't care who in this boarding-house hears me."

"Ah, ciel! Her eccentricities!" murmurs Madame, scenting offensive aspersions on Milor in the word "honest." "We are all true, we are all honest, Mrs. Wynch—M. Danton and all ze whole society of my house."

"And the very highest praise you can give us, Madame," says Lord Stair, coming across the room to Leah's side. "'An honest man's the noblest work of God,' Leah, is he not?"

"When I know more about the subject, I will give you my answer, Lord Stair," says Leah, coldly. "I have not had much to do with angels, hitherto, except fallen ones."

"Hitherto. But remember you have just made M. Danton's acquaintance."

He adds some remark in a whisper that brings back the smile to Leah's lip, the

colour to her cheek. Every chord, save one, in this feverishly-strung, vain, ambitious nature, Lord Stair can touch with a master hand. The girl, like her father, loves money with passion; no difficult task to keep her faithful to Jack Chamberlayne. Like her father, she loves rank, or the distinction rank may confer on herself; no difficult task to keep her faithful (such fidelity as it is) to Lord Stair. For the rest—oh, a cynical word of praise, a pitying disparagement, here and there, will withhold her for the present from carrying her fancy for Danton too far, and at some future day the existence of the fancy may prove rather convenient than the reverse. So judges Lord Stair, coming close to the truth, yet fatally missing it, after the manner of cynics. Have I not said that there is one chord in Leah Pascal's nature beyond his power to touch?

. . . The day passes by arrow quick.

Alas! each to-day becomes yesterday with fearful haste to Leah now; ere she can collect her own soul sufficiently to commune therewith to-day will be the yesterday of her bridal. A drive with half tipsy little Jack Chamberlayne, Deb doing propriety, in the Bois de Boulogne; a twilight flirtation with perfectly sober Lord Stair, no one doing propriety at all, in Madame's salon; every intervening minute filled up with millinery and the vendors of millinery. A quickly past, on the whole a singularly happy day. Admirers and new fashions suffice, as a rule, for Leah's earthly contentment, and to-day admirers and new fashions both are edged by the expectation of a keener delight. She dresses half an hour too soon for dinner, essays Jack's latest gift of diamonds—is discontented with their effect, puts on her pearls, her sapphires, discards them all. Debbie—in the agonised excitement, herself, of a rose-coloured sash and uncrumpled

muslin—Debbie watches these unwonted signs of perturbation on the part of her elder sister, and can draw no other conclusion therefrom than this, that Leah must be falling in love with Jack Chamberlayne in spite of everything.

“If it had only been with Danton!” thinks the child, pausing for a moment as she fastens on her diminutive satin shoe. But then if it had been with Danton there would be no money, no dinner-party, no rose-coloured sash for Debbie, or satin shoes with *real* mother-o’pearl buttons, like the grown-up ladies wear in the centre of the rosettes!

Considering those rosettes, even Deb, for the first time in her life, turns mercenary, feels that wealth, encumbered though it be by a lover redolent of tobacco and who plays Negro melodies on his chin, is not without its advantages.

Dinner is fixed for seven. At a quarter

before the hour Colonel Pascal, in full evening canonicals, awaits his guest upon the hearth-rug (laid down only on state occasions) of Madame Bonchrétien's drawing-room. Evening dress is not, ordinarily, the rule of the house; but to-night, in honour of the lovers, is to be a ceremony of white gloves, and the ladies are still in the tortures of preparation upstairs. All, save Mrs. Wynch. Fond of good food though the old woman be, she loves the indulgence of her humours better—will dine, shivering, in her own room off a “bully,” sooner than accept Colonel Pascal's hospitality.

“A man who will help himself before a lady!” The feud, I may say, shortly, commenced over stewed pigeons, Colonel Pascal taking the last piece of breast in the dish and handing the bones to his neighbour. “A man who will help himself before a lady, who marries his daughter to a petty cravy, who pads, who laces. . . . I thank you,

Madame! I have lived under your roof fifteen years, I have had to submit to much ; but I will not lower my dignity to become the guest of an ugly-bred person like Colonel Pascal."

Colonel Pascal is certainly not an ugly-bred person, as far as externals go ; above all, when got up, as at present, for effect, with every assistance that embroidered linen, diamond studs, rings, and a bit of red ribbon at one's button-hole, can yield. No one quite knows what Order of Merit that bit of ribbon represents ; but on the Continent these details matter little, and Colonel Pascal is too thorough a cosmopolitan ever to make his appearance decorated on the northern side of the Channel.

A small swarthy man, not over bald, considering his five and fifty years, with well-dyed whiskers à la Dundreary, keen dark eyes, a handsome hawk nose, and such a smile—the smile of a man whose heart

has not laughed for half a lifetime! Deep lines in plenty have the world, flesh, and auxiliaries, graven round Colonel Pascal's brow and lips; and still he has worn well; thanks to his tailor, dentist, admirable incapacity for feeling, and the serenity of conscience engendered by a fine digestion, looks a dozen years at least younger than he is. For good genial mammon worship, frank readiness of sympathy with all forms of human success, I don't know that I ever met his equal. His presence brings sunshine into the house of every prosperous man he enters—January sunshine, that makes itself seen, not felt. He is indeed the most unfailing weather-gauge of prosperity extant. Get on in the world, honourably or dishonourably, so long as you get on; possess a title, a carriage, a cook; be anything but poor and obscure, and you will find Colonel Pascal the most sincerely appreciative of your friends. Yourself, your taste, your

furniture, your children, all are charming! That is his word. A pirouetting ballet-girl does not fall back more surely on the tips of her toes than does Colonel Pascal after every little flight of social rhetoric upon the word "charming." Delightful weather, wonderful weather, Italian sky, Claude Loraine scenery—charming! Exquisite woman, shoulders of alabaster, statuesque throat—a waist, an ankle—charming! His daughters have nicknamed him "the Prince Charming."

"I don't know whether I do right to marry Mr. Chamberlayne," said Leah, in a moment of expansion, shortly after she accepted poor Jack. "But I am quite certain I do right to get away from papa. Deb's home will be with me; Naomi, with her face, is sure to find a home of her own, and the Prince Charming will be unincumbered. What charming daughters we shall all be—for conversational purposes; what pegs for reminiscent sentiment when he knows that

he is rid of us for ever." So little valued are men's social virtues, even the geniality of a Prince Charming, when seen in the fierce light that beats around their own fireside.

A quarter to seven ; five minutes to seven ; at three minutes before the hour Leah enters the salon full dressed, the smile that a pretty woman puts on with her bracelets round her lips. Colonel Pascal gazes at her with honest pride ; his daughter, *his* darling motherless girl on the brink of a hundred thousand pounds—and well he may. Never has Leah looked handsomer. Her arms bared to the shoulders, her delicate classic bust, shine like marble amidst the billowy laces and tulles of her amber silk dress ; her bright hair lifted high from her forehead, is ornamented by a single yellow rose ; her complexion, whose one fault, ordinarily, if fault it be, is want of colour, is heightened to-night into vividest carmine and snow. Colonel Pascal thinks

of his wife—the lovely gentle-souled wife, whose heart he broke, and sighs; lifts his handkerchief, even, to the tip of his well-cut little hawk nose.

“That dress becomes you marvellously, Leah. You have the same charming taste as your poor dear mamma. My beloved Esther always chose those faint shades of amber and citron as you do.”

Leah walks up to her father's side and surveys herself coolly in the glass.

“I have too much of you in my face, papa dear, to be really like her.” What a change comes into her voice when she speaks to him. You could scarce believe it the same voice that softened and pleaded to Danton six hours ago. “Turn and look now, a little more profile—there? Did you ever see such a duplicate in your life, barring the moustache?”

The likeness is extraordinary, taking the

features from one point of view, and with Leah, for the nonce, counterfeiting her father's expression—an expression that I only know how to describe adequately by the French word *fripon*.

“I hope the likeness is but skin-deep, my child,” observes Prince Charming sentimentally. “I trust you will make more of your life, be less heavily weighted, than your poor old father has been.”

It is a favourite figure of speech with Colonel Pascal, this of being “heavily weighted;” a vague convenient phrase, by which he throws all the little shortcomings of his life upon circumstances.

“I hope Bonchrétien will give us an eatable dinner,” says Leah. “Three francs a head, extra, does not leave much margin for entrées and game. We might have given five francs, I think, papa, when we were about it.”

The mention of francs brings Colonel

Pascal home briskly from the regions of sentiment to those of facts.

"Three francs a head extra, mind, *extra*—there is the regular subscription of the house to start upon—three francs a head, extra, ought to enable Madame Bonchrétien to send up as handsome a dinner as can be served in Paris, and make a good profit for herself into the bargain. You really forget my means, Leah, when you talk so recklessly, the heavy inroads I have been making upon capital already for your trousseau."

"But the trousseau will be your last expense, papa dear," says the girl, looking at him with coldly glittering eyes. "When the wedding breakfast is paid for, and the cheap champagne, and the narrow white ribbon for the favours, I shall have cost you my last sixpence, remember. Mr. Chamberlayne will henceforth have the exclusive legal privilege of dressing, supporting, adorn-

ing, or burying me, as the case may be."

"A wedding is a deuced expensive thing under any circumstances," says Colonel Pascal uneasily. He and Leah do not love each other, know that they do not love each other, at the best of times. There is something in the expression of her face at this moment that is singularly distasteful to him. "I wrote to Turnbull Brothers this morning, telling them to sell out another couple of hundred pounds, and even that will not half carry me through. If you were marrying a poor man—on my soul, Leah, if you were marrying a poor man it would be a much less costly business to me."

"And to me, too, perhaps," says Leah, with sudden pathos in her voice. Then, rallying quickly, "But if I can pay you back," she adds, "if I can pay you back, as I have agreed to do, you will be no loser in the end. The expenses of the sale—the wedding, I mean—are heavy, of course, but

if I can make it good to you out of Jack's money hereafter, I will."

"And in the meantime"—Colonel Pascal draws a dingy bit of paper from his pocket, unfolds, and holds it to the light—"this is not the time, perhaps, for domestic discussions, still, as we are talking of expenditure, the matter may as well be settled—in the meantime, I really must request less extravagance in the children's washing bills. Now, last week," he adjusts his gilt double eyeglass, and goes over the items carefully, "'petticoats, tuckers, handkerchiefs, stockings'—here we are—'stockings.' Seven pairs of stockings, between those two children, in one week!"

Well for him, perhaps, that he looks so steadily at the paper, that he does not read the expression of his daughter's eyes; such absolute, scarce-veiled contempt as those eyes discover! Leah is mercenary, if you will, but on a big scale; mercenary for the sake

of all that money brings, rather than for money itself; is bartering her youth for a hundred thousand pounds, but means to spend them; is mercenary, not a niggard. Perhaps I ought to write, is twenty, not fifty-five. Age makes such a world of difference in the character of our vices.

"And this sort of thing invariably goes from bad to worse. Give them seven pairs one week, they will want ten the next. Are you attending to me, Leah," she is tossing her fan to and fro with an air of the most impenetrable calmness, "or are you not?"

"I am attending to every word, papa. You wish the children to wear dirtier stockings. I will tell them so."

"I wish them to grow up without your ruinous indifference to money. I wish them to feel that they are the children of a miserably poor man. Seven pair a week!—it beats

me to know how they could have contrived to put them all on !”

“If you recollect, the weather was rainy, papa. It cannot have been Deb ; I am afraid, poor Debbie does not go out enough to get her feet wet ! But Naomi, you can hardly expect a girl of Naomi’s age to be seen in splashed stockings.”

“If Naomi looked where she was going she need not be splashed at all. I can walk from one end of the boulevards to the other, without a spot on my boots.”

“You are a few years older than Naomi, Sir.”

“I am, and I will employ the wisdom those few years have taught me by bringing up my children in habits of self-control, as honourable members of society. If Deb and Naomi want more than two pairs of stockings a week each, they must wash them themselves, and”——

The door opens with a flourish, and Prince Charming, all embroidery, diamond studs, smiles, and decorations, advances to receive his future son-in-law.





CHAPTER VII.

LEAH'S PRIZE IN THE LOTTERY.

A HECTIC little young man of four and twenty, smooth-cheeked as a woman, fair-haired, honest-eyed, and still with the vacant wasted look about his face of one whose life, moral and physical, has already run to ruin. His language is slang, his dress loud, his manner towards men that of an overgrown schoolboy, towards ladies, simply execrable; but then, from his cradle upwards, Jack Chamberlayne has been

familiar with every phase of attractive society, *save* that of ladies. Such is Leah's lover.

He walks up to her side, giving Colonel Pascal a couple of fingers on the way, and standing so close that his beloved must, perforce, inhale the atmosphere of tobacco and mille-fleurs that enshrouds him, looks her and her dress critically up and down, as a man might do a newly-bought horse of whose paces he is doubtful, then expresses his sense of mingled fear and admiration by a whistle. At which stroke of humour Colonel Pascal, the most fastidious Chesterfield save when a hundred thousand pounds are at stake, laughs pleasantly. Children will be children; and what are these two young things, so soon to be made one, but boy and girl—April daisies, innocent lambkins of the spring!

Leah shudders and draws away. A new phase of their mutual lives has commenced, silently, unknown to either, in this moment.

The "guests" descend from their various

apartments on the upper floors, the dinner bell sounds, and Prince Charming, as honorary host or master of the house, gives his arm to the Comtesse, a miracle of soft lace and grey silk and fine little high-bred smiles and courtesies. Jack Chamberlayne, sorely against his grain, is apportioned to Mrs. Tom-son, stiff as buckram, in plum-coloured satin, and with what the French call "ribbons that swear," depending from her head and shoulders. Naomi and Deb, in painfully fresh muslins and silk stockings (does Prince Charming behold the washing-bill of the future as he glances at those stockings amidst all the gas-lit grandeur?) Naomi and Deb are both conducted to the dining-room for the first time in their lives like introduced young ladies; Mr. Pettingall and old Major Macnamurdo, their cavaliers. Lord Stair, as the happy result of these combinations, takes Leah.

It is the first time he has seen Jack

Chamberlayne's betrothed in evening dress, none of Leah's Paris dissipations having as yet soared higher than a theatre or concert ; and before they reach the bottom of the staircase she has learnt what kind of sensation an arm and bust like hers will be likely to produce on jaded London eyes next spring. Whatever his other demerits, Lord Stair, to do him justice, has the knack invariably of leading back Leah Pascal's heart to its rightful allegiance ; of reconciling her, I mean, to her engagement and to Jack Chamberlayne.

The chiefs of the establishment await the company in the dining-room ; Bonchrétien, in a decent black dress, well made, with a decent black lace coiffure on her head, diffuse of attentions to every one, but as thoroughly self-possessed as though she were a duchess of the old faubourg—a Frenchwoman, in short. Miss Smith has put on a chignon, tacked down a faded green silk

—her one company dress—round the throat, and adorned herself with a necklace of cheap pearls. She has also superintended the making of the sweet dishes, and is a good deal flushed about the face from the work. “*Cette pauvre chère Smeet, who fagote herself like a chiffonnière endimanchée,*” says Madame, compassionately: Madame never loses a chance of compassionating Miss Smith’s modest efforts at rejuvenescence.

“I arrange the table for thirteen.” Bon-chrétien whispers this as Leah and Lord Stair go by. “But M. Danton comes not, and it is already five minutes past the hour. I bid Désiré remove the cover of M. Danton?”

“Yes—no—do as you choose,” is Leah’s answer. “If M. Danton comes, room can be made for him; if not, twelve is a luckier number any day than thirteen.”

She passes along, smiling, on Lord Stair’s arm, and is in her wildest, her most brilliant

spirits throughout the dinner—her heart beating every time a fiacre rattles down the Rue Castiglione, or the heavy house-door rolls to and fro on its hinges. Jack Chamberlayne, who is on the opposite side of the table, thinks he never before saw his beloved look so handsome; and under the influence of her eyes, and of papa's wine, whispers many amative confidences into Mrs. Tom-son's startled ear before the conclusion of the meal.

Out of fairness to Colonel Pascal, I must state that the wines are authentic, almost the only time of his life when as much could be said for him. In all common cases of hospitality Prince Charming treats his friends to the ordinary wine of the house, carefully deposited on wicker sledges for the occasion. For the wedding dinner, even, he is negotiating with his wine-merchant about some delightfully cheap and heady drug to be administered to the guests in the shape of champagne. Will not

that champagne be drunk *after* the irrevocable "I wills" are spoken? But to-night Colonel Pascal feels like a father, and bestows wines that are wines, blessings that are blessings, upon his future son-in-law.

Good wines, good plats; an adoring lover opposite; a friend whispering praises of one's beauty, assurances of his own devotion, at one's side! Leah gradually attends less to the rattling of the fiacres, grows callous as to the opening and shutting of the front door. Her fancy for Danton (I avail myself of Lord Stair's phrase) is, out and out, the strongest emotion her life has hitherto known—is in the stage when a breath, when anything, nothing, may blow it into passion! And still, should Danton not cross her path again, I believe she might get over the fancy in twenty-four hours—aided by an extraordinarily becoming pair of new earrings, perhaps in twelve. Quinine in ague, absence in love; and these maladies

we know, if taken in time, are curable. Leah, at all events, is of far too pleasure-loving a temperament to be superior to such anodynes as plats and wines and flattery, even were she much harder hit than is at present the case. Primitive and loyal natures may be found to whom Love, when he has once entered, is all in all. A palace or a garret, as the gods think fit to provide, so long as the object beloved be there! Leah, in the present stage of her moral development, would be glad to have a lover like Danton, just as she would be glad to have any other pleasant things of life; but she would be glad of him with all the accessories that money can give, and failing the lover could console herself with the accessories. I repeat—"in the present stage of her moral development." Till yesterday, remember, she had never troubled herself even to speculate upon the meaning of the word "love."

Danton comes not; but the food and wines are good, and Leah is looking, and knows that she is looking, her handsomest, and her spirits suffer no eclipse. After dinner enter a couple of oldish young men, friends of Colonel Pascal's *pour faire les frais*. Friends, do I say? Casual acquaintance of yesterday—the Prince Charming has no friends. Oldish-young men, without ostensible means of livelihood; bachelors, it may be presumed; picked up at a restaurant, on the pavement; picked up cheaply anywhere! Needy gentlemen, irreproachable as to manners and shirt-fronts, who sing a little, dance a little, play cards a little—and wear chains of eighteen-carat brass. Every foreign city abounds in stray utility men of this calibre and of British origin.

Colonel Pascal delights in entertaining upon what he calls the easy French system. No way like the French way for promoting real sociability. You pay people just as

much compliment in asking them to spend the evening with you as in asking them to dine—at the expense of a glass of sugar water. He is charmed to see his two friends (though a little uncertain as to which name belongs to which man), charmed to present them to his prospective son-in-law, and to his daughter, and his second daughter, whereupon Miss Naomi, for the first time in her life presented to any one, lifts her eyelashes, and slays both of the casual acquaintance with her beauty on the instant.

These poor gentlemen are absolutely without consequence from a commercial point of view—shirt-fronts and manners the extent, probably, of their worldly possessions. Still, a pauper may serve as a beauty-test as well as an elder son, “golden through and through;” and it warms Colonel Pascal’s paternal heart to see the looks of admiration that his second daughter calls forth. Leah splendidly married, Naomi safe to follow in

her footsteps, only Deb's washing bills left to pay during the intervals, few, it may be presumed, when the little girl will not be visiting her elder sisters. . . . The satisfaction good men feel at the successful close of all honest endeavour, glows on Prince Charming's face. He compliments Madame on the general serving of the dinner, compliments Miss Smith on the sweets. He falls into little affecting tableaux whenever either of his children comes across him—you may be sure they never come across him, save by accident ! He smiles, that frozen smile of January sunshine, on everybody.

Now, how will the young people pass the evening ? To dance there are too few ; and Mr. Chamberlayne does not care for dancing—drawing-room dancing. Conversation ? Jack is not great at conversation, unless he can repose his feet a couple of inches higher than his chin, and smoke incessant short pipes as he talks ; and then his themes are

not precisely drawing-room ones. Flirtation? But Leah must not flirt with her own affianced lover, and certainly must not flirt with anybody else—it will be quite as well when she and Lord Stair have done puzzling over that solitaire-board in the corner. Music?

“Yes, to be sure, let us have some music,” cries little Deb, catching at her father’s last proposal. “Jack, you will play for us, won’t you? Leah, Jack is going to play ‘The Ten Little Niggers.’ Will you and Lord Stair please to attend?”

Mr. Chamberlayne’s solitary accomplishment is that of evolving sounds that, among intimate friends, pass for tunes, from his own chin. This accomplishment, learned it may be assumed, in some of the lowest London music halls, has a weird, repulsive fascination for little Deb. Drawing up a stool close to her future brother-in-law’s knee, she plants her small figure thereupon,

and with her face resting between her hands, sits spell-bound; her dark eyes expressing mingled wonder, admiration, and contempt, as she fixes them intently upon the performer's face.

Jack's is not an intellectual countenance at any time, and with the forehead held well back, and the chin protruding, as he raps upon it with his meagre knuckles, he forms about as striking an illustration of the great Darwinian theory as could be imagined. Leah's attention to her game of dual solitaire becomes more riveted than ever.

"Capital, indeed, capital!" remarks Colonel Pascal, when the exhibition terminates; for once in his life the Prince Charming's lips refuse to give utterance to any of his favourite superlatives, "A most—um—ah, fatiguing performance, I am sure. Deborah, my dear, you ought not to give our good friend so much trouble."

"But Jack plays on his chin to amuse

his own self," cries Miss Deb. "When he was waiting for Leah to get ready yesterday, I came in and caught him playing 'Oh Jemima,' didn't I, Jack? and no one but old Mrs. Wynch in the room."

"When I am waiting for Leah to get ready I am glad to commit any foolery," says Mr. Chamberlayne. "Three-quarters of an hour every time a woman puts on her bonnet, is a pretty good strain on a fellow's patience."

The incipient growl matrimonial is in his voice; and in a second the solitaire board is pushed aside, and Leah has flitted across the salon to his side.

"If I am three-quarters of an hour now, when I am on my best behaviour," she whispers, "what shall I be hereafter, when I am on no behaviour at all? There is an interesting sum in the rule of three for your wise old brain to work out."

He is over head and ears in love with

her (I apologize to Love; but language is limited, custom arbitrary: we must use, not the literal, but the French-polish name for things!) and the word "hereafter," spoken as Leah speaks it, with Leah's breath upon his cheek, touches whatever softer emotion Jack Chamberlayne's heart is capable of. He returns her whisper by one that makes her cheek flush. Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, seated beside Madame de Miramion on a distant sofa, raises her handkerchief to her eyes. Mrs. Tom-son, like Jack Chamberlayne, has partaken of as much wine as she can manage, and is now in the stage of semi-tearful, semi-amative retrospection, when the sight of a pair of happy lovers is too much for her nervous system.

"During twenty-two years, twenty-two blessed years, me and Tom-son was all in all to each other." Alas!—verity in wine—where is the fine grammar of the Admiral's widow

now? "Love—it wasn't love, it was dotage!"

"So I should imagine, Madame," remarks the icy old Comtesse, moving a couple of inches further towards her own end of the sofa.

The dinner hour was seven; by eleven o'clock not even Leah's smiles can keep Jack Chamberlayne any longer from yawning piteously and aloud. "Music, who cares for music?" he cries at last, waxing desperate. One of the casual acquaintance has been treating the company to a lachrymose English ballad, "Absent," or "Away," or "Always," the kind of ditty gentlemen of his class habitually sing at evening parties, before supper. "What we want is some fun—dressing up, or acting or that—something to set us all laughing. What do you say, Naomi, and you, Deb? Oh, Leah's too fine of course!" This with a glance at

his betrothed, across the back of whose chair Lord Stair is now bending. "Leah don't like practical jokes, thinks them low. So we'll just have a lark by ourselves, we three."

Deb and Naomi, nothing loth, jump at the proposal, and away they all run, helter-skelter, upstairs. Half an hour later they re-enter: poor little Deb as a devil, in scarlet, with well corked face, with twisted paper horns; Jack as a chambermaid, with rouged cheeks, in a cap and bed-gown; and Naomi, beautiful Naomi, with her hair turned up under a chimney-pot hat, and in a suit of her father's Bond Street clothes, from chin to toe.

"Afraid of the governor," said Jack, when the children hesitated, awe-struck before the proposal of rifling Colonel Pascal's wardrobe. "Why, what is there to be afraid of in him? Catch the old sinner losing his temper when I am by. Oh, Leah

will blow you up, will she? Take my word for it, Leah won't blow anyone up till after the ceremony on Wednesday, eighteenth instant, six o'clock, P.M."

The travesties are well carried out. For a moment no one recognizes either of the three mummies; then—then everybody seems to become suddenly deadened, and looks uncomfortably at his nearest neighbour to see how the jest shall be taken. The sudden bursting of a practical joke among any party of human creatures above the age of ten (unless the human creatures be Jack Chamberlaynes) seldom fails to bring about this state of universal flatness and depression. Even Colonel Pascal's practised smile does not come at command to his lips.

"Naomi, my dear Naomi, you are really getting too old for such rough play, and Chamberlayne—most diverting, really, ha, ha! most diverting, but"—

"What we want is champagne, Governor,"

cries Jack, clapping Colonel Pascal smartly on the shoulder; the only man living, I should say, who has ever done as much. "Why, hang it all, everyone is as dull as ditch-water. Give us some champagne, and we will have a dance. None of your quadrilles or Lancers—a good, honest can-can, and I'll take Mrs. Amiral for my partner! Lord!" sotto voce, "won't I make the old girl spin!"

The situation is trying, is, perhaps, the very crucial trial of all that Colonel Pascal's spirit has had to go through during Leah's engagement. Refuse Jack Chamberlayne he dare not? give him cheap champagne, he dare not. The wretched man, far gone though he be, may yet be sober enough to know good wine from bad.

"My dear Madame Bonchrétien, I am ashamed to trouble you, but if you would let us have one bottle of your excellent Epernay. It is charming, really, to see

young persons in such fine spirits, charming."

But not so charming to see the same fine-spirited young persons drinking champagne out of tumblers, and, which is worse, inciting other persons to do the same. Down runs smiling Madame with her keys, up comes Désiré with a single bottle of champagne and half a dozen glasses. The wine does not go round the room.

"Apportez encore—moitié douzaine champagne," cries Jack in his vile French. "And more glasses—big ones. Debbie, what's the French for 'more glasses?'" Why, we are only just beginning the evening."

He drinks freely, helps the old ladies and gentlemen, the two pauper guests, with a lavish hand, orders Désiré about as if he were in a tavern. Colonel Pascal sinks in a sort of stupor into an easy-chair and watches it all. Champagne at ten francs a

bottle, and men picked up on the pavement—men invited to a cup of tea, and to be out of the house again in an hour—drinking it like table beer!

Thank Heaven, next Wednesday and the parsons will convert this madman, irrevocably, into a son-in-law! Thank Heaven, to-night is the very last time, in this mortal life, that he, Colonel Pascal, can ever be called upon to entertain him!

By-and-by tongues begin to loosen. The Epernay has done its work. Then one of the pauper guests, he who sang, volunteers to play, and the dancing commences. Jack dances with all the old ladies in turn, singly, two, three together. He carries Miss Smith off her legs; succeeds, by force, in teaching Mrs. Amiral Tom-son the cancan (Debbie tells Naomi, in sacred confidence, that she saw him kiss Mrs. Amiral Tom-son in the back drawing-room). His wild spirits are contagious. Even Lord Stair, at last, puts

his arm round Miss Pascal's slender waist.

"We have been wise long enough, Leah. Chamberlayne is right; let us make an evening of it. When you are with children, act like children."

"Or with madmen, like madmen."

So answers Leah laconically. She waltzes with Lord Stair, notwithstanding. The pauper, in a rattling, champagnish fashion, plays well. Madame's carpetless floor is, for dancing purposes, irreproachable. Lord Stair, in his day one of the best waltzers in Europe, is an admirable partner still, as long as the pace is moderate and the waltz not too long. And Leah, in spite of some inward shame, cannot help enjoying herself. Her cheeks flush, her bright hair falls, a little disordered, round her throat. At last, with her two hands clasped on Lord Stair's arm, her eyes upturned to Lord Stair's face, she pauses to recover her breath, just opposite the open door of the front salon; Jack,

who has whirled all the old ladies into a state of collapse, Jack, in his female travesty, with his rouged cheeks, his music-hall palpably vinous demeanour, at her side, fanning her.

Thus Leah stands. Thus Danton, quietly making his way up the stairs, candlestick in hand, sees his Fate again.





CHAPTER VIII.

A DANCE OF DEATH.

A PAINTER'S eye would, probably, be caught by the lights and shadows, the colouring, the artistic humour of the group; a preacher might sigh over its morality. Danton regards it from a widely different standpoint to that either of art or sentiment, and arrives at his diagnosis quickly—diagnosis of the dissecting-room rather than the pulpit.

I have spoken before of Leah's com-

plexion, clearly pale to singularity, but stained by every passing emotion, every gust of temper, with a hue at once too vermeil and too evanescent for perfect health. She is colourless as any marble at this moment, lividly white about the mouth and lips, and all the time with a flush like day-dawn upon either cheek. Her breast heaves unevenly. As she turns, amidst jests and laughter, with that matchless grace of hers, from friend to lover, from lover to friend, you can detect, if your ear be a trained one, the curious, hoarse unevenness of her voice. Poor materials for a career of fashion, these; an organization wrongly strung for the wear and tear of fast London life, the heats, chills, tight-lacing, insufficient clothing, carbonic acid, sleepless nights, and hard-worked days that the foremost rank in the most advanced of all civilisations has to endure!

And Jack Chamberlayne, what of him? For Danton is at no loss to identify yonder

painted travestied figure as Leah's lover: has not Désiré pantomimed for his benefit, with all the verve and malice of a Paris gamin, the refined little saturnalia going on in Madame's drawing-room? Jack Chamberlayne's haggard cheeks flame under their mask of rouge: a fire the reverse of holy is in his boyish blue eyes. His thin, nerveless hands are all a-tremble as, with comical airs and affectations befitting his assumed character, he alternately fans himself and his betrothed, who shrinks from the contact of his breath, and so draws closer to Lord Stair. Suddenly Jack coughs—a short, little rasping cough, that makes him raise his handkerchief to his lips; and Danton can reckon the length of the poor lad's tether pretty nearly as accurately as he computed that of any far-gone hectic patient beside whose hospital stretcher he stood to-day.

So much for the physical outlook of these

two people (Colonel Pascal's April daisies) who are to be bone of one bone, flesh of one flesh, bound together for happiness or for misery, like living nerves in the same body, till death them shall part !

And the marriage, muses Danton within himself, is what good people call a suitable one. Oh, eternal, inscrutable enigma—"the folly and stupidity of the good!" A fortune, if the bridegroom last long enough to inherit it, for a penniless girl ; a handsome wife for a man who has—shall we say, who has lived a *little* fast, and needs the reclaiming influence of sweet fireside affection ? If the opinion of science were occasionally asked, in addition to that of exultant chaperons, milliners, lawyers, clerks, and clergy, as to prospects matrimonial. . . . Well, the opinion of science is never asked, and he, Eugene Danton, has no more to do with Leah Pascal and Jack Chamberlayne than with any other pair of doomed lovers in that

Dance of Death called life, amidst which a surgeon, with open eyes and sealed lips, threads his way perpetually.

Hastily extinguishing his candle, he moves aside from the blaze of gaslight that issues through the drawing-room door, and has already advanced as far as the second flight of stairs, when little Deb spies him; Deb, whose infirmities hinder her from dancing like the rest, and who, sitting alone in a corner, is just beginning to realise that being swathed in a hot scarlet dressing-gown, and having one's eyes filled with cork-dust—yes, and even wearing a pair of twisted paper horns, to look like the devil—does not constitute such very ambrosial enjoyment, after all.

She rushes forward to the doorway, flies after Danton, and gets tight possession of his hand.

“We are having the most lovely party, Monsieur Danton! Come in and see

Madame's salon; 'tis like the theatre at Christmas. There's Naomi in papa's clothes and a chimney-pot, and Jack dressed like a chambermaid, in one of Rose's caps; and Jack has been dancing with Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, and some day I will tell you an adventure I saw in the back drawing-room, and I had two wine-glasses of champagne at my dinner; and this is only my make-up, of course. *I am wearing,*" says Deb, grandly, "a white muslin dress made with five little flounces and a panier, and I have satin slippers, Monsieur Danton, and a new rose-coloured sash."

She leads, drags him, whether he will or not, into the drawing-room; and Leah, burning with confusion, finds herself forced to introduce Danton to her lover—the painted, noisy, not-three-parts-sober harlequin at her side—her lover!

"Danton!" cries Jack, at no time very clear on subjects connected with literature,

and trebly hazy on all matters just at present, "why, that's the name of the poet laureate, isn't it?—fellow who writes idylls about heaven and hell, and that—or was it the French Revolution, Leah? You left school later than I did. Glad to make your acquaintance, anyhow, Mossou. You must come and stay with us in London; introduce you to all the literary swells, if you care for them; I don't. Introduce you to all the pretty actresses, if you care for them; I do. Have a glass of champagne?"

He claps his hand, with tipsy familiarity, on "Mossou's" shoulder, then, half pushing him along, half clinging to him to preserve his own equilibrium, manages to reach the table, where stand the champagne bottles and glasses. He pours out a bumper for Danton; he drains down half a tumbler full himself; begins to grow confidential.

"It's not often I take to a fellow at first sight, and, as a rule, I can't abide foreigners

at all ; but," looking at Danton as he speaks with glistening, solemn eyes, "I've taken a fancy to you ; by George I have ! Bit of a physiognomist — believe in physiognomy ; first-rate judge of character, I am. Now look," lowering his voice and touching Danton with his elbow ; "you see that old curmudgeon, that old Shylock, my future papa, over there?—tell me what's written on every line of his face, eh ? I am to be married to the daughter next week, you know. Italy for the winter. Not by any means sure I shall live through the winter. They must run their chance of that. . . . Take me as I am, without settlements, or not at all. Have some more champagne?—oh, you needn't be afraid, it's honest wine, and I shall be made to pay for it somehow. Danton," in a whisper, "you are a right-down good fellow ! Hang it all ! a man can't help being born a foreigner, and I don't mind what I say to you. They are a

regular set of sharpers here, Sir, from Lord Stair downwards."

He puts his hand under Danton's arm, and staggers away with him to the farther end of the back drawing-room, out of hearing of everybody; Leah, with a sense of shame almost beyond her power of endurance, looking on. She is keen enough to guess what kind of confidence Jack, in his present state, will make—could divine it, even were his glances in the direction of her father and herself less significant; and every expression, every smile that steals across Danton's face costs her vanity a smart. She does not love Colonel Pascal enough to blush for *him*. She certainly does not love Jack Chamberlayne enough to blush for *him*. Her shame is for herself. She desires to stand on a pedestal in Danton's sight; gives him credit—strange to say, when one considers her shallowness of insight—for being a man of "ideals," a

visionary who would entertain all sorts of absurd little chivalric notions about women, and the exalted position women should hold. And she has sunk to this already! Before Danton has known her two days, he must pity, to the full as much as he despises her.

"Leah, my love," says her father, with grating suavity, in her ear, "don't you think some music—not dance music, this time—would be agreeable before our little party breaks up?" Under Colonel Pascal's direction, Désiré is rapidly clearing away the wine and glasses, with strictest whispered injunctions to bring no more. "Monsieur—eh—ah, Danton plays, I rather think. Suppose we request him to favour us?"

"Monsieur — eh — ah — Danton is so charmingly engaged already, papa," answers Leah. "It would be a pity, surely, to break in on such an intellectual treat as Monsieur Danton must be enjoying!"

However, she quits her partner's arm—

she has forgotten to relinquish it ever since the conclusion of the waltz—and, with her face held high in the air, walks slowly across the room (“Where could old Pascal’s daughter have learnt to cross a room with such a grace?” thinks Lord Stair) to Danton and her lover.

Jack having cleared his conscience of much perilous stuff on the score of well-fleeced bridegrooms generally, himself, his loans, his gifts, and the rapacity of the Pascal family in particular—“For Leah is her father, down to the ground, Sir! A handsome girl, when she is in a good temper, and a figure—by Jove, I am sweet on the girl, I know! I would go through fire and water to marry her; but come to money, and the blood shows.” Jack, I say, having relieved his conscience on these, and several other vital subjects, is fast lapsing towards the melancholy or contemplative stage of intoxication. With his droll little dutch-doll face

on one side, his eyes glassy and solemn, his smart muslin cap twisted awry, and his feet perched on a neighbouring chair to the level of his knees, he certainly looks about the most grotesque antidote to love that woman's soul could conceive of, as his mistress approaches.

"Don't you think you have been amusing enough for one night, Mr. Chamberlayne?" says Leah, cruelly. "I have sent the children upstairs. I have told the children to make themselves Human again. Don't you think it is nearly time for you to appear clothed and in your right mind also?"

And she sinks down, her yellow draperies fluttering around her like the wings of a butterfly, upon a low ottoman at Jack Chamberlayne's side.

"If you knew how painfully foolish we have all been this evening, Monsieur Danton," glancing at Danton across her lover; "foolish, alas! without either wit or merriment, you would congratulate yourself,

I am sure, upon your good sense in having stayed away."

"I know I wish I had stayed away," cries Jack, candid if not gallant. "Black suit and choker—hate black suits and chokers! Worse dinner than you get at home: wine served in thimblefuls; and turned into the street at midnight!" Coherence and vowels are slipping out of Jack's speech fast; his words trip each other up ominously. "What's a man to do who's turned into the street — midnight — black suit and choker?"

The problem is evidently one of interest to him. As he works it out mentally, his eyes fixed owlishly on nothingness, his knuckles playing feeble fantasies on his chin, Leah manages to exchange one sentence with Danton.

"Don't . . . please, think worse of me than you can help," she whispers—oh, with what a quiver of the lip!

"If I am wise, I shall endeavour not to think of you at all," is Danton's answer.

Nothing more. Yet both feel that they have spoken their first words of love.

Up fusses Colonel Pascal, pointing out his toes in their patent shoes, with icily polite bow to Danton—not unreasonably anxious, perhaps, as to the chances of his future son-in-law falling down insensible at his fiancée's feet.

"You have asked Monsieur Danton to favour us, Leah?" Colonel Pascal never loses a chance of calling Danton "Monsieur." "A little music before we break up—ah! We are all familiar with Monsieur Danton's charming talent——"

"Play for us, will you?" interrupts Leah, raising her eyes, a sudden light in their yellow depths, to Danton's. "We have been having noise enough, and to spare, this

evening. A few notes of music will do us good."

Danton looks Colonel Pascal coolly and silently in the face. He obeys Leah on the instant. She follows him to the instrument.

"Am I to play for you, or for your father—I mean for the audience generally, Miss Pascal?"

"Oh, for the audience first!" answers Leah, with a blush. She has not three notes of music in her composition, but this only makes his question more flatteringly sweet to vanity. "You know the sort of showy things such an audience can appreciate, and then you will play something for me—me alone!"

Danton is a real musician. His father, a Florentine of noble birth, trod the boards from predilection—it was his famous *Raoul* in the Huguenots that won the heart of the shy young English girl, Danton's mother,

—and the son has inherited not a little of his genius. Waltzes, galops, mazurkas, “the sort of showy things such an audience can appreciate”—his fine taste and touch render even these artistic. Lord Stair saunters across the room and stands beside the piano; well-bred, attentive, contemptuous. Colonel Pascal, through his double eye-glass, watches the performance somewhat as one would watch a street boy with a hurdy-gurdy and white mice. The old ladies from the front drawing-room call out, “Very pretty indeed; thank you *so* much,” at intervals. Jack Chamberlayne——

Jack Chamberlayne falls asleep, and is not improved by the condition; few human beings, out of pictures, are. His mouth opens, his jaw droops, his head falls; he gives all sorts of impossible jerks and snorts every time that he recovers himself. Leah feels—the force of contrast, perhaps—that he was never so repulsive, so absolutely

hideous to her as at this moment! At last he fairly rolls from the sofa. Colonel Pascal, hastily advancing to the rescue, suggests that his dear young friend had better change his dress; "tight-lacing does not agree with you, Chamberlayne—a little feminine faintness, eh?" but contrives to get speedily away with him out of the room. Lord Stair, upon this, glances at his watch and suppresses a yawn or two; then, with his accustomed "happy knack of irrelevance," that great fundamental art of all men and women of the world, makes a sudden retreat to the front drawing-room and the society of the old ladies; and Leah and Danton are alone.

"And now you are going to play for me without an audience?" she asks, leaning so that her voice shall be heard by no ear save his.

("I wonder whether Miss Pascal knows the unfortunate, I may say the culpable,

history attached to the young man, Danton?" whispers old Mrs. Pettingall, mysteriously, to Mrs. Tom-son.

"If things go on like this, it will be some one's dooty to acquaint her of it," says Mrs. Tom-son, with after-dinner severity.)

"Yes, I will play for you, if you are sure you have not had music enough already."

"Enough? I am never tired. I could listen to real music for hours and hours." Leah's yawns at a concert are piteous to witness. In the finest parts of an opera she will examine the pattern of the prima donna's sleeve, or the quality of her lace trimmings, or a head-dress in the stalls, neither listening nor pretending to listen to a solitary note of the performance. "If you only knew the treat music is to me!"

So Danton plays for her a sonata of Mozart's, and plays it gloriously. As he

proceeds, the snowy breast heaves, the golden-brown eyes suffuse; she is moved quite beyond the capacity of thanking him by the time he finishes. That is the way, reader, when a woman chances to possess a pair of luminous eyes, a handsome mouth or brow. A strain of music, a picture, a poem, altogether beyond her comprehension—with a lover, actual or in posse, standing by—can kindle her into the expression of so much more emotion than she feels! Poor plain Miss Smith, sitting unnoticed in a corner, her hands stiffly folded in their benzined gloves, her insignificant grey eyes fixed and tearless—Miss Smith in her soul, I have no doubt, understands and feels the great master's thoughts a thousand times better than lovely Leah Pascal.

But the suffused soft eyes, the heaving white breast, effect their work of subjugation only too quickly. Danton is tolerably on his guard, as a man, against every crafty

weapon that a coquette can wield. As an artist, he is weak as an artist ! Leah sees this at a glance, and treasures up the newly-acquired experience for future use.

"I dare not ask for another piece now, Monsieur Danton, or for a song, as I should like. They are making such a noise, it would be an insult to Art to ask for more ; but some other day, to-morrow, if you could find time, and when the house is quiet. You will not refuse ? Music is the best of all medicines, I think, when one's spirit is sick."

"Medicine ? I should say few spirits have lees need of healing than Miss Pascal's at the present time," says Danton, as he rises from the instrument.

"Yes, that is just the way people judge each other," is Leah's answer. "If we could all know the truth !"——

These are the last words they exchange to-night. Jack Chamberlayne has now re-

turned, clothed, if not in his right mind, to the drawing-room, with Naomi and little Deb, again in the stiff white muslins and silk sashes. The two poor gentlemen, who have really enjoyed their entertainment, six glasses of champagne, better than they anticipated, are exchanging valedictory compliments with their host. Ten minutes later, the whole party has broken up; and Jack and Leah—who shall say how these things happen?—find themselves alone in a small vestibule, or cloak room, halfway down the staircase; Leah bright with smiles, Jack sulkily drawing on his great-coat, and with a cheroot, unlit, between his teeth.

The storm connubial (I use the term prophetically) lowers on Mr. Chamberlayne's brow, and Leah's guilty conscience is at no loss to account for his displeasure. She is really sorry for him, poor fellow!—is jealousy in a lover a crime that a woman ever finds it impossible to forgive?—helps him on with

his coat affectionately—alas! his weak hands need assistance—gives him his cane, his gloves.

“And are you really, really sure it is wise to walk, Jack, dear? Now mind you button your coat well up over your chest. I must see about getting you one of those nice Canadian clouds—the evenings are growing so chill. I should not wonder a bit if we have a frost to-night.”

“A deuced deal you care about my chest, don’t you?” is Mr. Chamberlayne’s gracious reply. “Oh, none of that, thank you,” Leah is actually offering to pin his cravat round his throat; “and if you dislike the smell of smoke, you had better return to the drawing-room. I am going to light up.”

“Jack! *me* mind the smell of smoke,” cries Leah, devoted, if not grammatical; “when you know that I mean to let you smoke everywhere and always! Why, what

is the matter?" putting her face within about two inches of his. "You don't mean to say that you are cross with me again, do you?"

The tone in which she asks this is perfect; caressing, repentant, conciliatory, ignorant of offence, everything a man in love could desire the tone of his adored one to be. Yet it happens that the heart of this particular lover is not reached. Men possessing the bluntest order of intellect have keen intuitions sometimes, the keener, perhaps, from their very lack of reasoning power. Jack Chamberlayne, with all his dullness, knows that Leah is acting, just as well as Leah knows it herself.

"I think, when I am present," he breaks out abruptly, and to Leah's astonishment, soberly, scarcely a trace of champagne left in voice or manner, "when I am present, you might have the good taste to behave yourself decently."

"Jack!"

"I have never looked upon you as better than other people, and I know, cursed well, what awaits me by-and-by. All I ask is, don't disgrace me when I am present. You will do as you like of course, when I am away; but don't make a fool of yourself, and of me, too, under my very nose, as you did to-night."

Surprise, indignation, pity — the semblance of a tear! Leah goes through the little stock repertory of injured innocence; but without marked success.

"Not know! — you know what I mean just as well as I do!" he persists. "Your conduct with that man is shameful. When you are married, I have no doubt you will be—like other married women," growls Jack, between his teeth; "but as an engaged girl, just for three or four days longer, you might try to exist without a flirtation, above all, with such a man as Lord Stair."

"Lord Stair! Oh, Jack, dear, you delicious creature!—you mean Lord Stair?"

"Whom the devil should I mean else," is the delicious creature's reply. "If there was another man in the house, besides toothless old dotards of ninety, I have not the smallest doubt you would angle for *him* as well."

He simply ignores Danton's existence. A penniless foreign fellow, who can jingle the piano, give dancing lessons, perhaps, or write books—why Leah would as soon think of Désiré as of Danton. If Jack had been married a dozen years, he could hardly be more exquisitely unsuspecting of the truth.

"Lord Stair! I flirt with him! You jealous of him! This is too much. Why, look at his age, his ugliness!"

"His age, his ugliness, did not keep Lady Arabella Reid from bolting with him, did they?"

"Please don't make me answerable for Lady Arabella Anybody's sins. *I* have no intention of bolting with Lord Stair, if you mean that."

"No, I know you have not; you are a vast deal too good a judge to do anything of the sort. It is not always the worst women who bolt."

"Then, would you mind saying what you do mean, Jack? I hate quarrelling, as you know, dear; let us have the whole grievance out, and make it up."

"I mean—that you let Lord Stair say things to you he ought not to say, if you will have it."

"And how in the world can you tell what Lord Stair says to me?"

"Because I know, everybody knows, the things he says to all women. Do you think I have not watched him—yes, and you, too, when you are together? And he is with you too much; he is with you

morning, noon and night, and, by —, I won't have it any longer! That's what I mean."

Leah brings her face exactly to the level of her lover's; she looks, with unflinching steadiness, into his eyes. "Jack, my friend, are you fool enough to think that I — I am flirting, as you call it, with Lord Stair?"

"A deuced good imitation of flirting," answers Jack, surly, yet half appeased. The truth of what she says (veiling that other truth he dreams not of) has made itself felt. "You don't care for him, I dare say. Doubtful," poor Jack! "if you could care seriously for any man; but you are flattered by his attentions, and you show him that you are. Lord Stair would not waste his time in running after any woman unless she encouraged him."

"And if I do—if I do make myself civil and pleasant to a man old enough to be

the grandfather of us both, what is my object? I am ambitious, I know. When have I tried to hide any of my faults from you? I mean to make my way in the London world; your way, too, Jack, and Lord Stair is just the one person who can help me—”

“Lord Stair and Bell Baltimore,” interrupts Jack. “Well, you will be well launched, in all conscience! the most disreputable man, the most disreputable woman in London for your sponsors.”

Leah reddens, but keeps her temper admirably. Nothing like an overburdened conscience for enabling one to hold one’s angry passions in check.

“Bell may be disreputable—I am afraid she is, rather—but, for all that, you were more than half in love with her, Sir. If there had been no Mr. Baltimore in the world, I am quite sure you would have proposed to Bell, not me.”

"If there had been no Mr. Baltimore," says Jack coolly, "I am quite sure Bell would have proposed to me for herself, instead of—"

"Don't hesitate, pray—instead of for her friend. It was our side, really, who made the offer, was it not, Jack? You did not follow us wherever we went; you were not jealous of every other man who looked at us; you tolerated our attentions simply! And then, one fine day, Bell hinted to you that my peace of mind was wrecked through your fascinations, and you consented, out of pity, to marry me. That was it, was it not?"

She holds her lovely face, soft with smiles, up to his, and Jack Chamberlayne takes her in his arms and kisses her, the quarrel ending precisely as so many of their quarrels have ended before. . . .

And still the reconciliation is but skin-deep, kiss-deep. Before the house-door has

closed upon him, Jack Chamberlayne knows that he has been befooled. The very second Leah finds herself alone, her heart gives a great leap of joy.

That kiss—well, 'twas nauseous, but it bought peace. And to-morrow, and to-morrow, and every rosy-hued morrow, until liberty be taken from her for ever, she and Danton will meet.





CHAPTER IX.

SI TU SAVAIS.

AND to-morrow, when it comes, is to-day, rosy-hued no longer. Work-girls with unfinished fineries—no ordering a trousseau from Roger or Vignon for a daughter of Colonel Pascal's: Leah has had to buy every item of her dress in the cheapest possible market, has had to hunt up the smallest milliners from the most unfashionable quarters—work-girls with unfinished fineries; the great washing-bill

question fought out in detail between Naomi and her father ; the half-cold twelve o'clock breakfast, dawdled over at Lord Stair's side ; the afternoon drive and love-making in the Bois ; the theatre in the evening, Jack Chamberlayne and Lord Stair both in attendance and not a glimpse of Danton. The next day, the same routine again, and the next. Then comes Sunday, October the 15th ; three more days she starts for the Italian Lakes, in the society of Mr. Chamberlayne ; and still she sees him not !

Fate, however, perversely propitious, ordains that Sunday, the 15th, shall amply make up for the wasted week-days—through Deb's agency. Ailing at all times, poor Deb is subject periodically to attacks of the most intense headache—attacks that doctors and doctors' stuff are powerless to avert, and during the continuance of which, her only solace is to lie in Leah's arms, and

moan or shriek, according to the violence of her suffering. Colonel Pascal makes it a rule to walk straight out of the house the moment any member of his family is taken ill, his sensibilities being altogether of too fine a texture for rough every-day use. Naomi is just a little worse than useless. If the contemplation of a face, perfect and cold as a tinted statue, could alleviate pain, Naomi would possibly not refuse her services, for half an hour or so, in the sick room. It happens, however, that the mere sight of this "thing of beauty" drives the poor small patient to distraction. Deb. wants the pressure of a cool hand on her forehead, wants her temples bathed, wants patient loving arms to uphold her ; in a word, wants Leah, and has her exclusively. If Leah were ready equipped in plumes and train for a first court presentation, an attendant admiring viscount on either side, I verily believe one of Deb's headaches would have power to restrain her from going.

Unhappily, our virtues—her love for Deb may be reckoned as Leah's one virtue—snare us to the full as effectually as our sins. On the night succeeding Colonel Pascal's dinner-party, Danton with a self-control not very frequently shown by men in such cases, resolved deliberately to strangle his liking for Colonel Pascal's daughter, while yet it remained a liking. It was love for a woman of her type that wrecked his life at one-and-twenty. Surely he has wisdom enough to steer clear of such a peril now. He will see the girl, put himself within the reach of her coquetry no more, keep away from the house, if need be, every day until her wedding, then—drink healths, throw old shoes with the rest (suffer a pang, perhaps when he gets a last glance of those eyes of hers at Jack Chamberlayne's side), and forget her, or, at least, think of her only as a moneyless man may do of a picture, racehorse, or any other object of

luxury too dear for his possessing. So Danton resolved, and, carrying out his resolution, has not once encountered Leah during the past two days. To-day, Sunday, he means to go down to some artist friends at Fontainebleau, and take an eight-and-forty hours' holiday, thus further putting the possibility of temptation out of his path.

. . . . Well, mid-day breakfast is over. Danton's train starts at two; there is barely time for him to run up to his room, write a letter, and be off—out of harm's way and into the good October weather, the crisp, fresh forests, and the anti-sentimental society of his artist friends, till Tuesday. He sings, for the man is really heart-whole yet, the old refrain, "Oh, ma maîtresse!" He is just hurrying by a door he dreads, and yet which he can never pass without a certain hope of seeing it unclosed, when Debbie's voice, weak and querulous, arrests him. Debbie's voice and then another, sweet and

low as any that ever wept beside the waters of Babylon—the voice of Leah.

Deb's attack has now passed from paroxysms of sharp pain to the stage at which she demands amusement; constant stories, told in the softest of undertones, short, vivid, dramatic, new; that is the grand essential for poor Deb—*new*. And Leah is curiously unimaginative. Bright in conversation, quick at appreciating and reproducing the thoughts of others, she is absolutely devoid by nature of the faculty of invention. But what will not love do? In the intervals between Deb's illnesses—this is truth, Reader; it does me good to write it—Leah searches every newspaper she comes across for such scraps of literature as the child affects, and gets them patiently by heart for future use. You shall judge what kind of literature this is.

“Tell me something new,” says Deb wearily, Danton listening the while. “Some-

thing of my sort—theatres or wild beasts killing any one, or like that.”

“Well, Debbie, you know about the tiger”——

“Who ate the boy in the City Road? I’ve heard it scores of times. You never know anything new, now,” says poor Debbie impatiently. “Before you were engaged, you used to tell lots of nice things, but now”——

“Debbie, you have not heard about the famous clown who is acting in London. When I am married, you shall come and stay with me, and we will go together—only you and me—to see him.”

“Oh, I’ve seen the clown so often,” says Deb, fretfully still, but with awakening interest in her tired voice.

“Not this one. Why, Debbie, hear what he does.” And now Leah falls back upon her lesson, learnt from the advertisement in the ‘Times.’ “‘Amidst the breathless ex-

citement of all present, this clown of clowns takes the incredible leap of thirty-five feet'—double the length of Madame's drawing-room, Deb—'across the arena. This single feat worth double the entrance money. His legs alone a study.'"

Being, as I have said, unimaginative, Leah stops dead short the moment her lesson is repeated. But Deb can happily supply any deficiencies to her own satisfaction. Deb is overflowing with imagination, and with those big eyes of hers sees into the unseen in a manner the grown-up men and women who surround her wot not of.

"'His legs alone a study,'" she repeats, after lying quiet for a moment or two. "Mustn't that be grand, Leah? Double the length of Madame's drawing-room. . . . Ah, I see it all! One, two—he is off!" Stretching up her little thin arms in the air. "He flies—no, he falls—no, it's nothing. Oh, Leah, how frightened I was!

Just feel; I have turned all wet and cold with fright."

"Well, don't think about the clown any more," says Leah, laying her hand soothingly on the child's forehead. "We will talk about the clown when you are stronger. Do you know that your bridesmaid's dress came home last night, Debbie? Cerise and white, and a long, long tulle veil to your feet."

No answer at once; then, "I wish some one would die between this and the wedding," says Deb. "Any one, I don't care who, as long as it was not you."

"Or you," says Leah quickly, and, stooping over, kisses her.

The door stands a-jar; and Danton, by this time, has moved into such a position that he can not only hear her voice, but watch her face.

"As well die as live alone with papa and Naomi. Oh, Leah, Leah, why did

you ever say 'Yes' to Jack Chamberlayne?"

Silence. Deb's eyes fixed intently on her sister; Leah sinking to the floor. At last, "Why did I ever say 'Yes' to Jack Chamberlayne?" she begins, a little tremulously. "As much for your sake, Debbie, as for my own. Papa is our father, so, of course, we will say that he is very nice."

"Oh, very nice indeed," interpolates Deb, her pinched face weirdly sarcastic.

"But—he is not fond of his daughters. How could he be? How could a man who was not fond of mamma be fond of us? Well, he dislikes Naomi the least, perhaps; and Naomi is certain, whatever happens in life, to fall on her feet. But you, Debbie," snatching the child with a sort of passion to her heart, "my marriage will be everything to you. You want country air and green fields, you poor mite!—I declare you don't

weigh as much as you did when I went away—and new milk and a pony. I know, every doctor has told me, what you want. And you shall have it all! Yes, Deb, and a fine little riding-habit made by the tailor. My dear, when I am married, you shall never be cooped up in a boarding-house any more.”

The words pony, new milk, green fields, act on poor Deb like some magic stimulant. She starts up, looking more like a dead child than a living one, declares her headache gone, and, for the first time for hours, creeps down out of Leah’s stiffened arms. And now M. Danton judges the moment come to give notice of his presence, by a subdued professional knock at the half-closed door.

During the past five minutes, every feeling of his heart, as regards Leah Pascal, has taken new colour and force. He has hitherto admired her physically: tolerated

her—as men do tolerate pretty women—mentally; shrunk from her, morally. And behold! at once she has become harmonious in his sight; her faults, and they are many, are condoned. The sordid commonplace life seems set in tune. Leah can love! He walks into the room, in obedience to Deb's shrill "Entrez!" and sees her pallid and untidy, the remains of her scarce-tasted breakfast on a table beside her, the floor plentifully strewn with silks, ribbons, and such like millinery litter of every hue and kind.

"Monsieur Danton!" Instinctively Leah's hand goes to her hair. Alas! Nursing is directly antagonistic to modish coiffures; the coronet of golden plaits is pinned at least half an inch awry. "Debbie, how could you? I felt sure it was Désiré."

She rises, flushing rosy red, and in this flush, and her untidiness, and with her

eyes worn and tired, looks lovelier than she has ever done before in Danton's sight.

"My visit is to Deb—a professional visit," he remarks gravely. "What have you been doing with yourself, Deb, to have one of your headaches again so soon? Too much champagne on Thursday evening, too much gas and excitement every evening of the week, I suspect."

Danton addresses the child, but he is holding Leah's hand, is looking into Leah's face with a grave interest, that makes her pulses leap.

"I was taken bad at nine, and it is now past one;" cries Deb, with importance. "And I have been in *torture* all the time, and I wanted to send for you, Sir, only Leah would not——"

"Debbie, my dear!"

"You would not, Leah—you would not. You said Monsieur Danton did his best to

keep out of our way, and, even to please me, you were not going to run after him! That is what Leah said, Monsieur Danton; and now you have come all of your own accord; and you will stay a long, long time, won't you?"

She makes Danton seat himself in an easy chair, then climbs upon his knee, and rests her hot head on his breast. He feels the weak, thready little pulse, asks one or two professional questions, inspects her tongue.

"If Deb were to run wild in the country for a year, we should have no more of these headaches, Miss Pascal. The physicians Debbie wants are fresh air and exercise."

"I know that," answers Leah. "When I live in England, I mean——"

"France would suit the child better," interrupts Danton, quickly. "Climate, soil——everything here would suit her better

than England. I know half a dozen honest country people within reach of Paris, who would be glad to take her in charge."

"Oh, but when Leah is married I must be near London!" says Deb. "You are going there, too, you know, Monsieur Danton. You say you will be surgeon some day at one of the London hospitals, so I shall be near you both. And Leah has promised to buy me a pony and a little riding-habit, made by the tailor, out of Jack's money."

Leah flames scarlet.

"I am outbid, Deb," says Danton, stroking the child's cheek kindly. "My poor country people might give you new milk and apples, and an occasional ride, perhaps, on a carthorse. A riding-habit made by the tailor is quite beyond my mark. Riding-habits made by tailors mean money, little Deb."

"I wish there were no such thing as money in the world;" cries Leah, her fair face kindling with a light so nearly resembling truth that Danton is fain to believe her words for the moment.

"And I wish there was money without the people the money belongs to," remarks Deb. "If just we three could be rich, without anybody else, we three, in a house, alone, and "——

"Monsieur Chamberlayne waits below," announces Désiré, peering with his mocking gamin face round the door. "Monsieur Chamberlayne will attend these ladies for their drive in the Bois."

Danton rises discreetly. "I am really not wanted, Miss Pascal," he remarks, with sudden assumption of the manner Esculapian. "If there is any return of the headache, you will let me know. I am not very far distant."

"Wait, at least, until we have had our

talk out, M. Danton," she says to him, lowering her voice. "It is so seldom I can get any one to give me a real opinion about poor Deb. Et vous, Désiré, dire à Monsieur Chamberlayne"—Leah's French verbs are something fearful and wonderful: it is a theory of Colonel Pascal's that handsome girls are better without education—"Dire que mon petit sœur est malade. Je n'aller pas sortir aujourd'hui."

"Mon petit sœur est malade." Désiré repeats Leah's murdered genders aloud with infinite gusto, as he whirls, imp-fashion, down one flight of stairs after another, and has the keen happiness of sending off M. Chamberlayne, boiling over with anger, from the house. He further enjoys himself by making all the mischief possible with Lord Stair. Milor, just starting for his afternoon lounge in the Rue de Rivoli, chances to be in the entrance hall when Leah's message is delivered to her lover. He lingers after

Jack has driven away, questions Désiré minutely as to the seriousness of the child's illness, the nature of her medical attendance, and ends by learning considerably more than he expected. Désiré's imaginative faculties are lively ; his tongue is pointed. True child of the Paris streets, he can hardly speak without being epigrammatic, is never epigrammatic without being malicious. Lord Stair, not ordinarily a lavish man with his money, glides a twenty-sous piece into Désiré's dingy palm before starting for his walk.

And Leah and Danton? Reader, they spend the afternoon together, and they do not employ their time in the exclusive discussion of Deb's headaches. Before Désiré has well reached the bottom of the stairs, Leah remembers—"Ah, she fears M. Danton has forgotten!—that promise of his to play for her, without an audience. And when Debbie has been ill, music soothes the

child better than any physic, and
and what a pity it is there is no piano
nearer than the drawing-room. If one could
only have a song or two, without the
society of the old ladies and Major Macna-
murdo !”——

“You can have as many songs as you like
by coming to my room, scarcely six yards
distant,” says Danton ; “and Deb shall have
grapes. You are well enough to eat grapes,
Debbie? I thought so. The thing is
settled.”

Deb runs on without waiting for a second
invitation ; but Leah—let me do her the
justice of saying this—Leah hesitates. She
is not scrupulous, overmuch, as to remote
moral contingencies ; quails not before the
risk of endangering her own peace of mind,
of jeopardising Danton’s happiness. That
she feels for him as she never felt for man
before, she knows full well ; the surrender
of liberty, the journey to the Italian Lakes,

only three days distant ! But her excitement-loving nature, avid of pleasure or of pain, makes her court rather than shrink before danger like this. What she fears, mortally, is—not her own weakness, but the discovery by others of her weakness. Let the distraction of the moment be attainable by thoroughly safe, though tortuous means, and there are few people apter at improving opportunity than Leah Pascal. At the mere suspicion of outraged conventionality, she is a coward. “A handsome girl is a saleable commodity, worth so much in the marriage market. An unmarried girl, by committing one open breach of social decorum, lessens, or runs grievous chance of lessening, her own money value. And money is lord over all ; and in forfeiting money, you forfeit everything.” This is the creed in which Leah’s soul has been reared — or starved. The keen satisfaction of accomplishing Danton’s conquest, nay, the de-

light, more exquisite still of surrendering herself to this new wild foretaste of love's intoxication pale before the master-principle, the great acquired instinct of her life—circumspection.

“Don't go on so quickly, Debbie; wait for me.” She says this in answer to some question she reads on Danton's face. “Perhaps it would be wiser, Monsieur Danton, to go down to the drawing-room?”

“Why? My piano is in better tune than Madame Bonchrétien's.”

“And you have no old ladies in your room—fearful temptation! and you have grapes for Deb.”

“And some Gloire de Dijon roses for you. Come.”

Danton takes her hand, draws it within his arm, and leads her away captive: just at this one moment, I believe, “had the fate been with them that has not been,” might lead her to the other end of the world—to a

happier, lowlier lot than any she shall know !
“I am overbearing to the people I like,” he remarks : “sick people, most of them, or wise men and women, the age of Deb ; but I don’t know what right I have to command you.”

“It gives me pleasure to be commanded,” says Leah. Involuntarily she thinks of the weak purposeless life with which her own is to be bound up, for all this side of eternity. “Nothing is so delightful as to have responsibility forcibly taken off one’s hands, as you are taking it now.”

“You had better let me take and keep it always,” says Danton, half jestingly, half in earnest.

For an instant Leah’s face is bright with smiles. Then, recollecting herself : “You would soon repent of the bargain, I suspect,” she answers, a little gravely. “Whoever undertook to be my conscience-keeper would find the office no sinecure.”

"I spoke of taking responsibility off your hands, Miss Pascal. Let me guide your actions, and I am quite ready to become your conscience-keeper afterwards."

"I think you two walk very slow," cries out little Deb. "If you don't make haste, Leah, I shall eat all Monsieur Danton's grapes before you come."

Danton's apartment is the pleasantest one in the house: on the strength of two small inner cabinets, which serve for sleeping and dressing-rooms, Madame Bonchrétien calls it a suite. "One of my permanent inmates, the Count Danton" (Madame confers titles on her lodgers at discretion) "occupies a suite of rooms on the third floor." The windows look south, towards the gardens of the Tuileries, and have carefully-tended boxes of mignonette and geraniums outside. Book-shelves, well filled, engravings, most of them of theatrical celebrities, are on the walls; a piano stands open in one corner;

before the fire is wheeled a luxurious, sleep-inviting sofa, among the cushions of which little Deb has already nestled herself. A lingering odour of tobacco pervades the apartment. Pipe-sticks of all sizes and nations, a faded white-satin slipper, now used as a tobacco-pouch, are above the mantelshelf. On the centre table, in addition to a glorious bunch of roses, stand a basket filled with autumn fruits and a bottle or two of wine. Danton lives—not like a Sybarite, but like a man who has discovered that life's best happiness is work, and that a grand help towards the achievement of work are creature comforts.

And creature comforts come to him so easily, with “*cette pauvre chère Smeet*,” living under the same roof! He returns home, fagged from the hospitals, and cool air and open windows greet him in summer ; in winter, a blazing fire, closed shutters, and books and papers, left *as he left them*, on

his table. If Miss Smith lack other more brilliant qualities, let this extraordinary virtue be recorded of her: she can set a room in order, yet leave books and papers intact! Fruit and flowers are sent to him throughout the year. M. Danton does not practise in Paris. At more than thirty years of age, he is a student still. But he gives his services gratuitously to his friends, penniless artists, half-starved chorus singers, and the like; and his friends repay him with such small offerings as their means command—and boundless gratitude! On a hundred and fifty pounds a year—this is the amount of his income, I should say, of his annual expenditure; “income,” he has none—Danton considers himself, not without reason, a rich man.

“I did not know that any room of Bonchrétien’s could look like this,” cries Leah. “Why, Monsieur Danton, you must be a millionaire. What fruit! what flowers!”

"The roses are fine, are they not? They are a present from a poor little woman who . . . well, never mind ; perhaps you would have nothing to do with my roses if I told you too much. Now, choose ; take any, or all, if you will."

"That is a poor compliment to the sender," says Leah, bending her face down over the flowers. "If your friend knew how you treat her presents, Sir?"

"My friend cares for my pleasure only, Miss Pascal, and nothing can give me so much pleasure, just now, as to see you pleased."

Leah, upon this, selects two or three of the finest roses in the bunch, and fastens them in her dress. She has accepted a great variety of flowers, from a great variety of donors, in her time, and you may be sure knows how to infuse the most delicately subtle flattery into her manner of doing so. Yet, to watch her little conscious blush and

flutter, a simple observer would declare she had never listened to a word of love, never encouraged a lover's hopes, before this moment. But Danton is not quite blind yet: his time is coming on lightning quick; every five minutes they pass together his senses become more hopelessly enslaved by the ineffable charm of Leah's face and voice. But he is not absolutely blinded; he can detect the actress in her still; can smile to himself over the very lures and artifices which will inevitably work his own undoing.

"I never feel quite sure about you, Monsieur Danton," she remarks, after a quick glance at his face. "You are exceedingly kind and flattering to me with your lips, and all the time I don't like the expression of your eyes. I wish I could be sure of you!"

"I wish I could be sure of myself, Miss Pascal," is Danton's answer; this time in

a tone which the most hardened coquette in Europe could scarcely affect to misunderstand.

Ah, well, how quick the hours, the happiest hours of Leah's life, go by ! Debbie, worn out, curls herself into a corner of the sofa, when her grapes are eaten, and falls asleep ; such sympathetic chaperons are little sisters of eleven ! And then, in hazardingly close proximity, they look over Danton's photographs, and Leah admires, but cavils at, the portrait which she is supposed to resemble. Too handsome, too handsome, by far, to be like her ! When did she ever pretend to possess a Grecian profile, a pair of faultless lips ? And yet she is vain enough to say, does Monsieur Danton agree with her, that her eyes have a different expression in them to *that woman's* ? The question suggests an argument on beauty, generally, which leads to a dissection of Leah's features, one by one, with

pitiless analysis by Danton of their defects. And then, after a time, they have music, soft music, not to disturb poor Deb; just a couple of French romances, the 'Serenade' of Schubert, and 'Si tu savais,' but that serve only too well to further the other little living romance on hand.

"Si tu savais." . . . Alas! Leah has learned it all too quickly, has gone through a cycle of mute teaching during the past couple of hours. Standing beside Danton as he sings, with that dangerous southern voice of his, Leah knows that she loves, and with a fool's insensate passion; knows that to feel the pressure of his hand, to exchange one kiss, one trembling word of hope, were heaven—quickly followed by the hell of poverty, the forfeiture of toilettes, fashion, all that her excellent marriage, the wisely-ordered sale of youth, nature, honesty, promises to bring!

Six o'clock clangs out loudly from the Madeleine, and at the same instant commences Désiré's energetic ringing of the first dinner-bell downstairs. With a start, Leah comes back from romance to fact, remembers that she and Danton have been alone three hours or more, and, waking up Debbie hastily, rushes away to her own room to prepare for dinner. The dress she chooses—Danton and she will be likely to remember that choice until their life's end—is a black silk, thickly covered with tiny yellow mouches, or beetles; a silk that has seen long service, but that becomes Leah's rich-hued, Eastern beauty to perfection, as she knows. A necklace and cross of amber, the Gloire de Dijon roses at her waist-belt, and she looks divine; the first clothes-artist in Paris could not improve her by a single touch. Let her put on what she will, hastily or after a couple of hours' rehearsal, you always feel that Leah Pascal is in the attire

that suits her and the occasion as nothing else would. The girl may love, marry, conduct her earthly affairs, or choose her heavenward path, by the light of reason: she certainly dresses by inspiration, pure and unalloyed.

"If you had only known Monsieur Danton before you said 'Yes' to some one else," cries Deb, watching her with big fond eyes. It is about the hundredth time poor Deb has harped upon the same futile "if."

"Better late than never, Deb," answers Leah, lightly. Her spirit is buoyant, her heart gay as the roses she wears; she is heedless of yesterday, of to-morrow, of everything in space or time, save what the next three or four hours may bring forth. "We cannot help our ultimate fate, but we can laugh at fate as long as possible. Don't look so wise, Deb; and put on your new sash, child, it will do your headache good.

Monsieur Danton and I are the very last people in the world to be lovers, but we may be excellent friends, he and I, and you, too, my pet, notwithstanding."

"And Jack?" says Deb appositely. "Isn't Jack to be excellent friends, too?"

"Oh, Jack will be—a great deal more than a friend, of course," answers Leah. And she changes colour, and becomes grave. The sound of Jack Chamberlayne's name has produced a curious effect on her. Walk abroad in the country on one of those hawthorn-scented mornings when every breath you draw seems a new lease of hope and life, then suddenly hear a death-bell toll across the sunny fields, and you will know the kind of effect I mean.

Sunday is always a quiet evening at Madame Bonchrétien's, and this evening it is exceptionally so; only eight people at the dinner-table. Colonel Pascal, at the first mention of his little daughter's illness,

absented himself, overcome by his feelings, from the house, and is not likely to leave the shelter of his club until midnight. Bonchrétien has gone, for four-and-twenty hours, to a sister at Versailles, carrying away Naomi Pascal with her. Even to Naomi, obnoxiously hungry, nourished at half-price though she be, Madame Bonchrétien is lavish of civilities under the present golden prospects of the Pascal family. Mrs. Amiral Tom-son dines out. Old Mr. Pettingall attends the evening service of his church, having made his dinner at lunch-time, according to his invariable Sunday custom.

“Quite a small family party, are we not, Leah?” says Lord Stair, rubbing his white hands and looking more than usually amiable—about the lips, rather than with the eyes—as Leah and Debbie enter the dining-room, Danton with them: I don’t know how this accident happens. “Ah, Danton, how are

you?" It is almost the first time he has addressed Danton during the two years they have sat at the same table, certainly the first time he has done so without the prefix of "Monsieur." "A thousand pities Madame Bonchrétien cannot limit our party to this number always. We should have opportunities of getting to know each other more intimately."

And he continues in the same pleasant, talkative mood throughout the whole of dinner. Secretes almonds, and sweet biscuits, playfully, for Deb (Lord Stair playful! *has* the undertaker measured him for his coffin yet? thinks Deb with a shiver); talks politics, or as much politics as men ever talk in Paris, with old Major Macnamurdo; helps Mrs. Wynch to the entire breast of a fricasseed chicken, and orders a pint bottle of Möet for himself. Were Leah less thoroughly absorbed in her own fast-multiplying emotions, such unexampled geniality

upon the part of Lord Stair might well afford her ground for suspicion.

Immediately after dinner the society separates. Lord Stair, pleading an engagement, leaves the house; the old ladies, doubly sleepy by reason of its being Sunday, creep away to the drawing-room; and then, with Deb in her arms, Leah prepares to mount the hundred and one stairs that divide the rez-de-chaussée from the third floor. Not, however, until she has exchanged a whisper, as she passes, with Danton, a whisper that poor little forsaken Miss Smith notes and sighs over!

Debbie, never a ready sleeper, is trebly long in shutting her eyes to-night, more exacting than usual in the matter of Leah remaining beside her pillow and talking her into drowsiness with stories. "I know very well you want to go, Leah. I can see by your face you want to be off," holding her fast, prisoner, with her small hot hands.

"And this one evening I thought I should have you to myself—Naomi away, and no horrid lovers about, and papa at the club. Pray what was all that long whisper of Monsieur Danton's?"

"Whisper of Monsieur Danton's" repeats Leah, innocently. "Let me see—why, that there was a talk of another war; oh, no! that was what Major Macnamurdo said. As far as I can remember, Monsieur Danton made some brilliant remark about the change in the weather, but I am not sure."

"Leah, if I try, honour bright, to go to sleep, will you solemnly promise to stop by my bed afterwards?"

"Well, of course, I must run down for a cup of tea, Deb; nothing more."

So Leah evades the promise, not without some pangs of self-reproach: then, the moment Deb's breathing announces that she can move with safety, glides her arm from beneath the child's pillow, and makes her

way swiftly as her feet will carry her, down to the drawing-room.

It is now close upon ten o'clock. Mrs. Wynch, Madame la Comtesse, and Major Macnamurdo are dozing in their chairs; Miss Smith, greyer and gloomier than usual, sits in her place of office, behind the tea-cups. Beside a window in the farther corner stands Danton. The night is like July; one of those delicious, hot, still nights which gladden the world occasionally in late autumn—our faithless mistress, summer, mocking us with one last kiss before she departs! Leah drinks her cup of tea, and forces Miss Smith into conversation; she makes the circuit of the salon, and has something pretty to say to everybody; and then, accidentally, she finds herself near a window that stands open, becomes aware, for the first time, of M. Danton's presence, and stops short. If Miss Pascal had studied strategy under Von Moltke himself, she could not have executed

this little masked flank-movement more neatly.

"Monsieur Danton, positively you have one of Madame's windows open after six o'clock. The establishment will go to the bad if this sort of laxity is allowed."

She joins him, and they watch the stars together (and each other's faces); presently lean forth a space, to breathe a fresher atmosphere than that of the salon: presently wish it were not too late to take a turn, just a quarter of an hour's turn, round the gardens of the Tuileries. You know the kind of easy gliding pace at which the journey along the downhill road invariably commences.

"Too late, and why too late?" says Danton at last. "It is barely ten o'clock yet, Miss Pascal. If you like to put yourself under my charge, we can walk half the length of the Champs Elysées, and be back by eleven. You really want exercise after

all your nursing; take my professional advice."

"If I could be sure nobody would know," says Leah, glancing round at the three nodding old people; "if one could be positive Lord Stair was out of the house; and if it were not for Deb."

When a woman urges only one objection, there may be a chance for her; when she can think of three or four insuperable barriers to the carrying out of her own wishes, she is lost. Leah is lost, as far as a ten-o'clock unchaperoned walk in the Champs Elysées may be said to constitute perdition.

"I really don't think I should mind, but for Deb," she hesitates, two words from Danton having swept away all other obstacles. "If Deb should wake"——

"I will answer for Miss Smith being in her room."

He crosses over, upon this, to Miss

Smith's side, and with a whisper electrifies her. Love may be Platonic or the reverse; jealousy is jealousy always. Miss Smith, in an instant, realises Danton's danger as clearly as she foresaw it the first evening of his return to the Rue Castiglione.

"My dear Monsieur Danton, anything you ask me to do is, of course, a command. But for you and Miss Pascal to venture out at this hour alone! It is unheard-of, incorrect, and a very great risk, under the circumstances, for Miss Pascal."

"Yes, you will go up to the child's room, will you not, and stay with her till her sister's return? Send Rose and Désiré to bed, and when I ring, let Miss Pascal in yourself. May I rely on you?"

"If you think such a proceeding wise, either for you or for *her*."

"My dear friend, if I could ever think any of my proceedings wise!"

He telegraphs by a look to *her* that the

latest difficulty is solved; and gliding, with her noiseless step, from the room, Leah runs upstairs, lightly as though she trod on air, to dress. After putting on her bonnet and shawl, she steals on tiptoe, with shaded candle, to take a farewell glance at Deb. The child is sleeping softly; not a reproach can conscience urge upon this score. And she will be back so soon; and she does so crave for air and movement, so passionately craves for one more hour—the last, it may be, in this mortal life—spent with Danton!

He awaits her at the bottom of the stairs, and after scanning her attire, item by item, sends her back promptly to the third étage, for a thicker veil and plainer bonnet. Her shawl, being black, will pass, and her dress. Unversed in millinery, Danton considers her dress black also, forgetful of the shining yellow mouches, the fatal yellow mouches, that, to the eye of an adept, would be

visible in the darkest street, the thickest crowd in Paris.

"Now you are disguised to perfection," he whispers, when she comes back to him a second time. "You might stand before a court-martial of old ladies; you might meet Mr. Pettingall himself without fear of recognition."

"If I thought there was a chance of meeting him—of meeting any one—I would turn back yet," says Leah, waxing cowardly.

But she is under the guidance of a will stronger than her own. She hesitates, draws away; a minute later finds herself quietly walking along the Paris streets on Danton's arm.



• CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE LIMES.

WHAT a night it is! All above the city's heart the sky shows, duskily purple, above the flicker of the gas; but westward, in the direction of Passy, a big full moon has newly illumined the horizon, and trees and roofs at every instant stand out more delicately clear against the passionate amber of her light.

Leah and Danton traverse the Rue de Rivoli, then make their way into the

garden of the Tuileries, and in five minutes' time are comparatively alone. All is still among these leafy allées—so still that you might hear a bird stir among the branches, or an insect hum. The measured footsteps of an outlying sergent-de-ville, the whisperm of an occasional pair of happy lovers, seem to heighten rather than interrupt the profound silence of the place and hour.

They walk on slowly, arm-in-arm, not talking. Now that the final plunge is taken, the irrevocable moment come, that must transform "the game begun between them for a jest" into sharpest earnest, Danton's spirit is heavy, his heart disquieted within him. That he loves this girl, whom he has known for half a week, he can no longer doubt; loves her with the unreasoning passion born of sense—it may be, during the past few hours, with the dawning of a higher, enduring feeling. Love, an expenditure (not an income) of a hundred and

fifty pounds a year, and obloquy ! Such is the prospect he, Eugene Danton, has to offer Colonel Pascal's daughter, in exchange for the hundred thousand pounds of Jack Chamberlayne. How abject must be his folly, should he make such an offer ! How bitter, how sealed the ultimate doom of both, should she listen to him !

And Leah, while her hand trembles on his arm, while every silent moment spent together is intoxication, Leah is shivering in her very soul with terror over her own rashness. She gauges pretty accurately the depth of Danton's feelings for her, is prepared—when, in such matters, is a woman not prepared?—for his being “imprudent” enough to declare himself, has generously resolved to soften the pangs of rejection by as large an infusion of pity as her sense of duty permits. But I must have portrayed Leah Pascal very weakly, if you think that one serious intention of braving the world's

opinion, or of holding the world well lost for love, has ever presented itself to her imagination. She has been trained to consider marriage as a profession, the only lucratively honourable one open to her sex, and no more dreams of giving up Jack Chamberlayne, than a man, because he chance to have taken a love fancy, would dream of giving up his calling as a barrister or merchant. Love . . . and marriage! To realize how absolutely these two ideas have, up to the present time, been divorced from each other in Miss Pascal's mind, you must be tolerably well versed yourself in the Gospel according to St. Mammon—the gospel by whose light alone the Prince Charming's children have been reared.

Leah's soul—I repeat it—shivers affrighted over the rashness of her own escapade, and in her terror her fingers involuntarily close tighter upon Danton's arm. He whispers all the reassurances as to her safety that such

an appeal demands, and presently, to render the chances of any hazardous rencontre still fewer, turns with her into a narrow side walk leading towards the Place de la Concorde—a walk so shadowed by over-arching limes and chestnuts, that Leah, for the first time since she left Madame Bonchrétien's house, takes courage and lifts her veil.

"If Lord Stair himself should meet us here, he would find it a hard matter to recognise me," she remarks, with an uneasy little laugh.

"Always Lord Stair! I should have thought there was some one more nearly interested in your comings and goings than Lord Stair?"

"You mean Mr. Chamberlayne? Well, you see, it is so easy to set poor Jack's mind at rest. Lord Stair is the kind of man to know of a folly—I am afraid I am committing one at this moment, M. Danton

—the kind of man who would know of a folly without letting you suspect his knowledge for a dozen years, and then bring it all out, fresh and green, to destroy you with at the last. Jack flies into the most fearful rages for about five minutes, and forgets everything!”

“I like that kind of character,” says Danton, “You at least know, with a man like Chamberlayne, what ground you stand upon. His is a thoroughly true nature, Miss Pascal.”

“Ye-s,” assents Leah, taken aback. Is it to listen to Jack Chamberlayne’s praises that she is walking alone by starlight with M. Danton? “And still I should hardly have thought that you and he would be the kind of people to get on well together.”

“‘Getting on’ is a strong expression, Miss Pascal. Out of a thousand, five thousand people, how many does one get on with? Chamberlayne strikes me as a frank, upright

little fellow, a man I should be exceedingly ashamed to deceive—'twould be so easy—simply that.”

“My beau ideal is a state of things in which it should be unnecessary to deceive any one!” cries Leah. “The exact reverse of the world in which fate has set me. You look upon me—ah! I know you must—as artificial and false. Well, I don’t think I should have been so if my mother had lived. I never—believe me when I say this—never told her one falsehood.”

How could any man keep his head cool with a woman as lovely as Leah, pleading eagerly, humbly for his good opinion? Danton feels strength, wisdom, self-command, all deserting him fast, and Leah goes on, under her breath, and with emotion, that for once comes from her heart. “You think Naomi handsome, do you not? You should have seen *her*. Why, the children in the street would turn to look at her as she went

along, she was so beautiful—and sweet and loving! Perhaps that has turned me bitter, made me old while I am still so young, the thought of my mother, and of all the love she wasted on that—on papa, I mean. It was a runaway love-match, M. Danton. Mamma was the daughter of a rich city merchant, and she gave up all—riches, family, religion—to become my father's wife."

"And their happiness lasted?"

"Did it ever exist? When I was a child I used to look into my mother's eyes and wonder if they ever could have worn any other look than that sad, hopeless one I knew! Papa—how shall I speak of it—papa when he married thought that her father would relent, for certain. A Jew"—dark though it be, Danton can see the flash in Leah's eyes as she brings out this word—"A Jew tradesman! How could such a person keep up resentment, long,

against the man of birth, the Christian gentleman, who had condescended to marry into his family? And the Jew tradesman died, just about the time I was born, and left us all paupers; did not mention my mother's name, or the name of her well-born husband in his will."

Concentrated passion is in her voice. Easy to see that her instincts, the ineradicable instincts of race, are on the side of the Jew tradesman, her grandfather, and against Colonel Pascal.

"From that time till she died mamma's life was a martyrdom. Put Naomi, put me," cries Leah with spirit, "into such a position, and we could pull through it. We have mingled blood in our veins, are his children as well as hers, and might—by heaven, we *would*—give back wrong for wrong, hatred for hatred. But mamma was soft as water, strong only in her enormous love for us, I think. She was dying for three years;

the doctors said of some heart complaint, in many syllables; of a broken heart, I say. At last, when poor Deb was a baby a few months old, mamma put her into my arms, quite suddenly, one day, and died—in a moment, as they had always told me she would die. Ah, that day, that day! And yet, in the middle of my grief, I made Naomi kneel down, I remember, and I held Debbie, and then, Naomi lisping the words after me, I thanked God, aloud, for having taken our mother out of his reach! He was away—when was papa not away?—and I wrote to him . . . such a letter! If my father loves me little now, he may well be excused, on the score of that letter alone.”

She pauses, her breast heaving, every nerve in her frame a-tremble. “And your life after this?” asks Danton presently, but in an altered voice. Something in her story has touched him acutely—touched him in a

widely different fashion to aught that Leah's philosophy dreams of!

"Our life after this, M. Danton, can be summed up pretty accurately in one word, 'neglect.' Papa lived in a house in London for some years, and as we could be boarded at home a little more economically than at school, we were kept there. The servants looked after us, or did not look after us, as they chose. Sometimes we went through the pretence of a governess. Sometimes we improved our minds at a cheap day-school. Debbie was always sick, and as papa said there was no money for expensive nurses, we elder ones had to look after her as best we could. But for Deb I would have run away—I swear I would. I used to tell papa so with delightful frankness whenever he reproached me for any of my domestic shortcomings. And all this time, you must know, we kept up an 'appearance.' Papa had relations and friends in London, and these people came to

smart dinners occasionally, and we children had to put on smart dresses, and tell our little falsehoods, and act our little filial tableaux with papa. . . . Well, well—why should you be interested in such a history? Years went on, the London house got too dear for us, I suppose—I have never attempted to understand papa's money matters. At all events we left it, and began to drift about from lodging to lodging, from boarding-house to boarding-house, as you see us now. We have had many near chances of becoming rich, M. Danton, but, somehow, all have fallen through our fingers. Once, papa was engaged to a nabob's widow, and the bank containing her thirty thousand pounds broke, the week before the intended wedding. And once, at Cheltenham, the marriage breakfast was all but ordered for an elderly young lady, with a Manchester papa, who went wrong about settlements at the last. As for me—if you knew the

number of excellent matches I have just not made!"

"A poor look-out for Mr. Chamberlayne," remarks Danton, somewhat dryly.

"Oh, I am not speaking of the present occasion, of course. There is no one sufficiently interested in the matter to forbid the banns this time."

"You believe that? Suppose"—his voice falters—how terribly in earnest he is! thinks Leah—"Suppose some one deeply interested in the matter were to forbid the banns at this moment."

"It is very unkind of you to joke, M. Danton."

"I was never farther from joking in my life, Miss Pascal."

"Well, then, what do you mean? I declare I have not the very faintest idea. Please tell me."

Not for one instant does she lose her self-possession, although she loves. A de-

claration, all the debatable ground that borders on a declaration, is such familiar territory to Leah Pascal.

“ I mean that *I* forbid them,” says Danton—his peremptory, most unloverlike tone startles her—“and for reasons, odd as it may seem to you, unconnected with banks, settlements, or money in any shape. Thinking not of these, but of the somewhat graver issues of Life and Death, *I* forbid the banns !”





CHAPTER XI.

“SPARE HIM !”

LEAH remains chilled and silent, and, after a minute, Danton goes on.

“If I could feel like the stranger I really am to you, Miss Pascal, I should doubtless have made my bow, and offered my congratulations with the rest. These things crowd so thickly round a professional man’s path that life might be spent in vain interference were he to speak his mind about every ill-omened marriage he is forced to

witness. But I am interested, too deeply, perhaps, in your welfare, and I cannot see the sacrifice without, at least, raising my voice in warning. It were better for you and Chamberlayne both to die, than to make the promises you purpose making to each other next Wednesday."

"I — — am exceedingly obliged to you, M. Danton," says Leah, stiffly. She had nerved herself to listen to an outburst of passion, however wild, but was by no means prepared for a physician's lecture. "Mr. Chamberlayne and myself should be greatly flattered by your 'professional' solicitude."

"Chamberlayne would be the first person to see the sense of my opinions," returns Danton. "In the course of the few words we exchanged the other night, Chamberlayne said enough to convince me that he judges accurately of his own state. Plain language, in a matter like this, is best. I will speak

plainly. His is a disease from which there are few recoveries, Miss Pascal."

"I am sure I don't know about that. In these days it seems that everything can be cured. Papa has had the best advice in Paris, and Dr. Ducie himself says that with care and quiet"—

"Dr. Ducie! For a hundred-franc fee what will Ducie not say? Care and quiet may prolong the poor fellow's life. They will never patch him up into even decent health again. Ducie knows it as well as I do."

"I would not forsake the man I loved," says Leah—yes, positively, she can bring her lips to use that word "loved" with steadiness. "I would not forsake the man I loved, because of his infirmities. When I first promised to marry Mr. Chamberlayne, he was in no robuster health than he is now."

"Then I have nothing further to urge.

A sacrifice made in such a spirit is, of course heroic. One moment longer, if you will have patience to listen, and I shall have done. You are not overstrong, yourself."

And again Danton's voice falters, betrays him ; again Leah prepares to temper justice with mercy.

"Not overstrong? Why I have never had a day's sickness in my life, and yet I have nursed Deb through measles, chicken-pox—every disease under the sun—without help from any one. Your science is at fault, M. Danton. I mean to live until I am a hundred years old."

"Properly taken care of, there is not the slightest reason why you should not do so."

"And what do you call being properly taken care of?"

"Shall I tell you?" Involuntarily his arm presses the fingers that rest there. "In the first place, then, your life ought to be spent without excitement."

"Excitement *is* my life. You might just as well tell me to go without food"——

"Without excitement, absolutely. Without late hours, crowded rooms, stimulants, opiates, cosmetics, or any of the other thousand poisons that a career of fashion entails."

"Good Heaven! we are getting tragic! And instead of these?"

"Instead of these, for the next two years at least, a monotonous, soporific kind of existence in some very different climate to London or Paris. Your days spent out of doors, your evenings alone with well, you would not be sent into exile, I suppose, without one companion. Not a single dinner-party, not a ball or theatre; none of the haste, and whirl, and fever of town life, which, with a temperament like yours can have but one most tragic ending!"

He pauses, and Leah is silent. As near

a declaration as any man can go without actually declaring himself Danton has gone; and yet—yet he does not stand committed! And they are fast emerging towards the Place de la Concorde; in another two minutes they will be under the gaslights, amongst the crowd again, and his fate will rest on his own hands still. “Spare him,” whispers the better part of Leah Pascal’s nature. “He loves you, as these Quixotic sort of men do love, and you would not part with a tithe of your coming riches for his sake. Spare him the present humiliation, the lasting shame of rejection.” But the whisper is all too weak to combat the promptings of vanity. Every woman who is a practised coquette is apt to be more coquette than woman in moments of temptation.

“You offer an alluring picture, I must confess, M. Danton. The *dolce far niente* for two years, and a slave—I think you said

I might be allowed a slave?—to carry out all my little whims and humours. Oddly enough”—she adds this in a graver tone—“your advice, almost word for word, was given to papa about me once, by our old doctor in London, the same doctor who had attended mamma. Deb was ill, and quite by accident he felt my pulse one day. It is the queerest, shakiest morsel of a pulse in the world. Judge for yourself.”

And she stops, and taking her hand from Danton's arm, holds out her wrist to him. Just here, it chances there is an opening among the interlaced lime-branches overhead, and the pale star-lit heaven shines full on Leah's face, radiant with a look of tenderness, such as, I think, it never wore till this instant — a look, perhaps, of that dead mother whose beauty, rather than whose soul, she has inherited.

“Quick, faint, irregular. I know beforehand all the trite physician's jargon. Tell

me something quite new, this time, M. Danton !”

The slender wrist on which his fingers press is warm: the lips, with their pleading sweetness, are close to his. Many a stronger man than Danton has fallen before seduction less potent. He answers—not in trite physician’s jargon—not, certainly, by the telling of anything new. . . . And Leah bows, for the first time during her twenty years of life, the captive not the captor !





CHAPTER XII.

AT THE CAFE CHANTANT.

AN hour passes, and they are slowly sauntering along the Champs Elysées still —Elysian fields, in truth, for one pair of foolish hearts on this voluptuous autumn night? They go back day by day, almost minute by minute, over every stage of their brief acquaintance. They retrace the looks, the words, by which their love has progressed; argue hotly as to which began to like the other first, have a serious

quarrel as to which will like the other longest! They speak of the future vaguely, brightly, as people speak who know that life is to be gone through, hand in hand. And all this time, no mention of Jack Chamberlayne, of Colonel Pascal, of October the eighteenth, Leah's marriage day. For one brief hour they are lovers, as unconditionally as though no prior claim bound either of them, as much cut off from sordid care or presentiment as were the first pair of lovers in the Garden. One hour: then comes the moment of awakening.

"I have written my prescription," Danton whispers, "and you must follow it, dearest." Dearest! And sixty minutes ago it was Mister Danton, Miss Pascal. A week ago, and each had not heard the other's name. "Two years, at least, spent tranquilly in the south"——

"With my slave to wait upon me?"

"With your slave to wait upon you. Afterwards, a life of quiet obscurity in some place where your slave may minister a little to the good of others as well as to his own happiness! These are the physician's orders. Shall you, or shall I, be the first to make them known to your father?"

"To—to papa?" she stammers; "I don't think I quite understand you. Make known our secret"——

"To your father, and also, of course, to Mr. Chamberlayne. I will do as you wish to the letter, will bear the whole burden of guilt undivided — this evening, if you choose! And yet, Leah, would it not be better to put me altogether out of sight at present, and rest your conduct upon the soundest basis of all — your own want of love for the man you are engaged to marry?"

But not a syllable can Leah force herself to utter in reply. Danton, who is accustomed to be tolerably in earnest in most

things, takes it for granted that, with all levity, the girl is rather false or faithful; has definitely foresworn, or definitely transferred her allegiance. Leah, who knows herself to be only playing—horribly serious though the comedy has grown—shrinks uneasily from the question which must put her sincerity to the test. She has been surprised into loving, much as an actress may be surprised into shedding genuine tears; and while she is half ashamed of her own folly, cannot face the inevitable shock of disillusionment without a pang.

"It would be different," she falters, at last: "Don't be angry with me for my weakness—it would kill me to have to bear your anger! Put yourself for an instant in my place, and tell me *how* I can act otherwise? It would be different if things had not gone so dreadfully far about poor Jack."

"I don't know what you mean by 'dreadfully far.'"

"Oh, well, everyone belonging to us in the world has been written to, and all our relations have sent me presents, and Jack's people too. I have some hundred pounds' worth of presents, papa says—and there is the trousseau bought . . . papa has run I don't know how much in debt to pay for it. . . . And even the breakfast ordered!" adds Leah, gaining firmness with every corroborative detail as to the adamant nature of her fate.

Danton, on this, turns round, and, loosing the hand which a moment before was pressed so closely on his arm, looks long and steadily into his companion's face.

"If it is beyond your strength to give up Chamberlayne, may I ask why you are here in the Champs Elysées with me?" he cries sternly. "For once let me hear the truth—

give me an honest answer. I have misunderstood you long enough."

The tone, the question, are almost brutal. And Leah loves him better than she has ever loved him yet!

"I am here because I am utterly—despicably weak!" she exclaims. "And still I don't know that *you* should be cruel enough to blame me! Papa's poverty is not my fault. I cannot help being forced to marry for money any more than I can help caring—caring too much"—

And then, a tremble of the perfect lip—tears! and Danton relents: at the end of another minute is asking forgiveness for his "cruelty." A girl with indifferently shaped features and a sallow skin might have said precisely what Leah said, and produced no effect upon a lover of average sense, save that of repulsion. But when Beauty utters plaintive little mercenary sentiments, with tears in her eyes and plaintive lips, who can

withstand her? Not Danton; though few men have had sharper experience on the score of mercenary beauty, and the kind of shaping it is apt to give to the lives of others.

They settle everything by a compromise; in fewer words, they settle nothing. They love (on this cardinal point there is thrown no shadow of a doubt), and Leah swears to be faithful to her love—if she can: perhaps the wisest oath a woman of her strength can make. Only let her have to-morrow for reflection. Let Danton go away to his friends at Fontainebleau, and give her time to think, commune with her own heart, cast about her for what chances of salvation may yet be open. Above all, let them keep silence respecting to-night! With the cup of Paradise at her very lips, Leah would still be a woman of the world, tremblingly alive to the risk, not so much of what she does, as of what she does being discovered.

Let no one in Madame Bonchrétien's house have a suspicion of her imprudence until the moment arrives when the truth may be heard of all men. And meanwhile——

“Meanwhile,” says Danton, taking her hand and drawing it again within his arm, “for one more hour, one more half-hour—I hear the clocks striking the hour already—you are Leah, my own, to me! Not Miss Pascal, not Mrs. Chamberlayne. Well, half an hour's happiness is an enormous gain in a man's life. I am thankful for it. Don't let us speak of to-morrow again, love. There is no to-morrow for me.”

His voice is changed, but tender as ever; and Leah, with a sense of relief, sighs forth some pretty platitudes about his goodness, his generosity, then nestles closer to his side. It would require a revelation from heaven to tell her *what* feelings have been resolutely

put to death in Danton's breast at this moment!

Exceedingly few women and men understand each other when they are in their sober senses. How must it fare when they are under the blinding influence of love? Danton is unworldly to a fault; Leah worldly almost to a virtue. With hand clasped in hand—aye, with heart beating against heart—a gulf, deep as the nethermost hell, must ever yawn between these two. And still, for a brief space longer, they are one! Though intellects be severed wide as pole from pole; though spirits differ in quality as gold from clay; love, youth, and a silent autumn night can produce sympathies that *seem* so faultless—while they last.

They walk on slowly, miserly of every instant spent together, until they reach the Rond Point. Then, all at once, Miss Pascal discovers that she is tired, and that

nothing will refresh her so much as listening to the music at a monster café chantant, about a hundred and fifty yards further on !

The music is vulgar, Danton objects; the crowd more than corresponds to the music. No matter; Leah will have her way. Even in a moment which may be termed the supreme experience of human life, in the bewilderment of dawning passion, this restless, contradictory nature is dissatisfied, craves for some other emotion beside the actual one. It is not enough to feel; Leah Pascal must see, be seen; must have an audience, though the first chance acquaintance who recognises her may bring shipwreck to every dearest ambition of her heart. And to the café chantant they go.

The old, old scene awaits them. A woman in white satin and bare shoulders, singing such songs as the Parisians affect, with brazen voice and gestures; citizens

accompanied by wife and daughters, citizens accompanied by other than wife and daughters, listening. Punch, bitter beer, gas, tobacco-smoke. A good many gay women's dresses, a good many women's faces the reverse of gay. Who wants a description of a café chantant in October?

Well, Leah Pascal enjoys it. The songs are—such songs as the Parisians affect; she does not understand a word of them. The music is atrocious; she does not know one note from another. A tinkling Champs Elysées orchestra, or a ballad artistically sung, are accompaniments, simply, to whatever scene of her own life Leah Pascal may be enacting. And as to the crowd—inasmuch as a crowd has eyes and can admire—even this one is more congenial to Leah's taste than solitude. Her graceful figure shows, notwithstanding the heavy shawl that muffles it; the thickest veil can only partially conceal her well-poised head and throat.

Not a man who passes but gives her one of the looks which to Leah are essential as the air she breathes, quickly followed by a glance, such as men do bestow upon the companion of a beautiful woman, at Danton.

In every recollection of lost joy it is said there is always *one* special remembrance that predominates—an hour, a moment, that surpassed all others in intensity, and which memory unconsciously chooses as the ineffaceable type and model of the rest. Little as she knows it, Leah, during the next three minutes, is probably standing at such a pinnacle—is tasting happiness for which regret may vainly sicken in the time to come. Vanity flattered ; the craving for excitement, which to her is a physical need, gratified ; and love, strong as heaven, has given her to feel, warming her heart.

During the next three minutes. Then, turning her face away from the orchestra

and singing people, she sees straight before her—and freezes as she sees—Lord Stair!

He stands alone, under the gaslights, scarcely a dozen yards ahead, conspicuous by reason of his tall stature, his high-bred British air, among the crowd of small Parisians. His face is impassive as Fate itself. Not a glance in the direction of Leah and Danton betrays that he has recognised them. He is studying the little pink concert-bill he holds in his hand, and seems quietly attentive to the roulades of the lady in shoulders and satin on the stage. But Leah knows, feels, that she is on the brink of deadliest peril, and a faintness seizes her for very terror.

“Keep yourself calm,” Danton whispers. “If you accept my love, will not the whole world, Lord Stair included, know it. How can it matter that you have been seen with me in any place, at any hour?”

“Take me away, or I shall faint,” she

gasps. "You don't know how easily I faint. Take me home—anywhere away from him? Oh, Monsieur Danton, veiled, disguised like this, I must be safe! Tell me, on your honour, that you think me safe!"

Danton leads her back as quickly as he can through the crowd. But the crowd has become denser, and before they can get free of it Lord Stair passes them so close that his showing no recognition, even of Danton, is suspicious. The lights are at their utmost brilliancy in this particular spot. They shine full on Leah's shrouded trembling figure; they cause the golden mouches to stand out in traitorous distinctness upon her fatally chosen skirts. And it is a boast of Lord Stair's, that he never overlooks, never forgets, one detail of a woman's dress. Leah feels as though her salvation must hang upon his want of memory now.

Clinging tight to Danton's arm, she finds

herself at length in darkness and fresh air again, and, half turning, sees Lord Stair moving in an opposite direction, his face coolly impassive as before, the little pink programme in his hand. With any other man she might feel herself safe. Any other man would have recognised or not recognised her. Not so Lord Stair. To get the weak into his power, and *keep them there*, is one of Lord Stair's pet foibles. Five, ten years hence, Leah Pascal feels that she may meet him, not knowing if he suspects her ; worse still, not knowing to what kind of use his suspicions may be turned.

All the bloom is off their love-talk. The trembling fingers, the agitated voice, bear unmistakable witness as to the earnestness of Leah's terrors ; and by that very earnestness Danton can measure, only too well, the probable duration of her faith to himself.

"If you accept my love, will the whole world not know it? How can it matter in

what place, at what hour, you have been seen with me?"

He repeats his former consolation, with more of the same nature; and Leah answers, almost petulantly. Everything is undecided; the truth will have to be broken gradually, decorously. Whatever the circumstances, whatever her real innocence, society would never pardon a woman for such an imprudence as she has committed——

"Society! Ah, to be sure; you care for the opinions of society," cries Danton, hastily. "Forgive me, Leah; I am a fool! At every moment I—I misjudge you, child! Now the thing is to get you out of this 'imprudence' without loss of time—throw Lord Stair, and everyone else, as much off the scent as may be."

He walks on with her at a rapid pace down the Champs Elysées and across the Place de la Concorde, then turns into the Rue de Luxembourg, and after, a minute or

so, bids Leah wait under the shadow of a porte cochère while he hails a fiacre. They are now at the corner of the Rue du Mont Thabor, not two hundred yards distant from Madame Bonchrétien's house.

"And I can be of no further use, Miss Pascal," says Danton, as he hands her into the carriage. "I am a quick walker, and will keep you in sight till you are safe home; but you are better without me than with me! Tell the driver to ring loudly, and do you yourself walk straight up into the drawing-room among them all. If you are questioned, you have been spending the evening with a friend—a dozen excuses will, I am sure, occur readily to you, in case"—even by the uncertain lamplight she can see the quiver of his lip—"in case, after all, you find it convenient to disown your walk in the Champs Elysées. Good-night!"

"Oh, Monsieur Danton! are we to part like this?"

She will make no money sacrifice for him. She is shivering with fear lest the paltry two hours' happiness she has accorded him should be discovered. And yet to lose one iota of his regard is agony. If it were possible to have money, with all that money brings, and love, such as this man could give, safely hidden away, so that it should never shame her, yet lending meaning, colour, warmth, to the chill glitter of her lot! If one could unite heaven and earth, God and mammon, honest love and a dishonest, sordid marriage! Alas! what lives are wasted, what hearts broken, over this endeavour—this “plastering together of the True and False, with vain intent to manufacture therefrom the Plausible!”

“I shall see you to-morrow, early, Monsieur Danton. Don't make me pass an utterly miserable night by parting from me so coldly.”

“Coldly!”

The driver, with folded arms, with stolidly unseeing face, sits on his box ; the passers-by are few. Danton and Leah are as much alone as though a hundred star-lit leagues lay between them and Paris. He takes both her hands in his, clasps them, and then . . . he hesitates for a moment, and lifts them abruptly to his lips.

“ I shall see you to-morrow evening, Leah ; not a moment earlier. Such a resolution as you have got to make will want four-and-twenty hours’ hard thinking over, at least.”

“ You will find me fixed as I am now,” she exclaims, carried for a second fairly out of herself. “ What would be the loss of friends—of the whole world to me? How can I ever be false to you after to-night?”

“ And if you are ‘false,’ as you call it, I forgive you, my poor little Leah ! Remember, I told you so beforehand. In being

false to me, you will be true to all the substantial goods of this life."

"Except the greatest good of all," murmurs Leah, the tears glistening in her eyes, her features working with emotion. "If I had never known you, substantial goods, as you call them, might have satisfied me—not now."

So they part. Danton pays the coachman his fare, and directs him where to stop, in the Rue Castiglione; and in two minutes' time, Leah, like one awakening from a dream, finds herself ascending the familiar stairs of Madame Bonchrétien's house.

Now, if she can only contrive to reach the shelter of her own room unseen! Miss Smith, respectful of manner, coldly mistrustful of face, opened the porte cochère to admit her, and has already returned to the salon. If Leah can but make her way, unnoticed, past the Argus eyes that haunt that dreadful first floor, she will be safe.

But no such happy chance stands her friend. The salon door is open, and old Major Macnamurdo, busily mixing hot whisky and water at an end table, sees and speaks to her. To shrink from notice, after this, were more hazardous than to confront it, Leah decides, quickly ; and with Lord Stair safely out of the house, what danger is there, in fact, for her to dread ? She throws back her veil ; calls up one of the smiles of command in which, as we know, she is a proficient, and answering Major Macnamurdo's remark with a jest, passes on into the salon.

Lord Stair himself stands before the fireplace.





CHAPTER XIII.

M. DANTON'S WIFE.

LORD STAIR stands calm and imperturbable, just as Leah saw him half-an hour ago at the Café Chantant, in the Elysées; the only outward difference being that he holds a tumbler of whisky-and-water, instead of the little pink concert programme, in his hand.

From October till May, it is a received usage in the Bonchrétien establishment that the boarders shall partake of a mixture

pleasantly called by Madame *punch Anglais* on Sunday evening. It was Madame herself, I believe, who, in a genial mood, instituted this conviviality, on account of "ces messieurs" dining earlier to attend the services of their faith; every glass of spirits being charged as an extra in "ces messieurs'" weekly bills. As Leah enters, Mr. Pettingall, the Comtesse, and Mrs. Amiral Tomson are drinking their punch, with gusto, before the fire; with the thermometer at eighty, Désiré builds the after-dinner fire, high as ever: Lord Stair sips, or goes through the form of sipping his. And Leah's soul prophesies evil on the spot. Lord Stair is not poisoning himself on Madame's Sunday whisky—is not keeping up Sunday conversation with Mr. Pettingall—for nothing.

She throws back her veil, loosens her shawl, and, with her heart beating till she can hear its beats, walks in amidst them all, as steadily as she will walk up the church on

her father's arm next Wednesday. You will not find one woman in a thousand but possesses this kind of courage, as useful, perhaps in its lowly way, as the fine animal contempt of danger that enables men to face sunk fences and five-barred gates in the pursuit of foxes, or mitrailleuses and Martini rifles in the quest of glory. Lord Stair fixes his eyes—when he is extraordinarily in earnest, Lord Stair's eyes lose all their obliquity—full upon her face, and Leah returns the look, unflinchingly.

“You have been out—to church, of course?” he remarks, pushing up a chair for her, an odd sort of marked gallantry in his manner.

“I have been out, but not to church, Lord Stair,” returns Leah, with composure. “Evening church is a work of supererogation quite out of my line.”

“It is deeply to be regretted,” says old Mr. Pettingall, sanctimoniously — “thank

you, Macnamurdo; you may mix me another half-glass, with rather less water this time—deeply to be regretted that the English residents in Paris avail themselves so little of the appointed observances of their church. I may say that it is a pity the English residents in Paris put aside so many of the other observances which in our own Protestant country are enforced!”

Lord Stair, on the deliverance of this little homily, coughs into his hand and looks moral. Mrs. Amiral Tomson and the Comtesse shake their heads, with meaning, and give each a side glance at Miss Pascal. It is evident, Leah sees, that public opinion—theameleon public opinion of a boarding-house—is against her. Not a soul amongst them, unless it be Lord Stair, can know anything definite about herself and Danton. But suspicion-germs, like those of other diseases, float in the air, imperceptible to sight or touch, yet fulfilling their deadly

office only too surely. Désiré knows that M. Danton visited the chamber of la petite, Mademoiselle being present; Rose, the chambermaid, knows that the rooms of the young ladies were vacant during the afternoon, and that music and voices were heard from the salon of M. Danton; Miss Smith, silent as the tomb, but still a woman, knows that Leah Pascal and M. Danton left the house in each other's company at ten o'clock, and that Leah Pascal returned alone at midnight.

With such materials in existence, how should suspicion not be rife? And how should suspicion, once engendered, be other than rancorous? The legitimate lover a millionaire, the unlawful one a pauper! Could infidelity blacker to orthodox eyes be conceived of than this upon whose brink Leah Pascal stands?

Mr. Pettingall delivers his homily; Lord Stair coughs into his hand and looks moral;

the glances of the old ladies are in themselves a whole concordance. Leah's courage waxes faint. And twenty minutes ago she was ready to brave the world, wished there were more worlds than one to brave, for Danton's sake!

The entrance of Colonel Pascal causes a momentary diversion of interest. The Prince Charming returns in excellent spirits from his club, where, indeed, every one, save his future son-in-law, has smiled upon him. With a daughter on the eve of realizing a hundred thousand pounds, 'tis surprising how genial even club acquaintance will become, men who a month before never could recollect one's name for twenty-four hours at a stretch! Just in time for a glass of Madame's punch. Well, this is better luck than he deserved. Seeing no light in the entrance hall, he half feared to find the salon deserted. "How are you, my dear Mrs. Tomson? Macnamurdo, your rheu-

matism better, I hope. What, Leah, in the drawing-room still? Then my poor little pet up-stairs is better than Chamberlayne's accounts lead me to fear. I need scarcely make the inquiry."

"Little Deborah has passed a quiet evening, I thank you, Colonel," remarks Miss Smith, in her chill monotone. "I have been sitting since tea-time at Deborah's side. The child has scarcely stirred."

Miss Smith—one enemy more than she counted on!

Leah's cold fingers clasp each other tighter. Oh, if Danton were but here! With him, she almost feels that it would be a relief to stand up boldly, and, facing them all, tell the truth. Without him—well, if falsehood be necessary, she feels that she can tell *that*, too; better without him, probably, than in his presence.

"And—and you, Leah?" says Colonel Pascal, turning to his daughter. "Ah, I

see, you have been spending the evening out. At Rosina Sherrington's, of course?"

Rosina Sherrington is Leah's one young lady friend in Paris, her prospective chief bridesmaid. They meet daily for conferences on wreaths, veils, flounces, and favours; they kiss when they part and meet, love, detest, confide in, and betray each other by turns. As the future course of Leah's life will run widely apart from Miss Sherrington's, I may be brief in speaking of her.

"You have spent the evening with Rosina?" repeats Colonel Pascal, a little tartly. Has not Jack, between every change from gin-and-potash to brandy-and-soda, been growling fiercely about Leah's "cursed caprice" of the afternoon? "And yet, when Chamberlayne called, I understand, Deb was too sick for you to see him!"

Leah makes no answer. She is not in-

disposed towards falsehood, on a large and saving scale: to tell paltry untruths that to-morrow may expose is not the sort of weakness to which she is prone. She makes no answer; her father eyes her more sharply; all the suspicious old faces round the fire eye her more sharply. Quietly and naturally, Lord Stair steps in to the rescue.

“Chamberlayne has to learn the grand lesson life teaches all of us—that a woman’s will is never to be questioned. A lover! Why, my dear fellow”—he is addressing himself to Colonel Pascal—“a pretty woman may have a lover any day. But a friend, a dear, detested female friend to discuss next Wednesday’s toilettes with! What chance has Chamberlayne—has any man—against a rival like that?”

The good humour returns to Colonel Pascal’s face; it is the first time in this mortal life he has been called “my dear

fellow" by a Viscount, and Leah breathes once more. She is saved; and, in spite of herself, her eyes give a quick look of gratitude at Lord Stair. Friend or enemy, Lord Stair, it is evident, means to play his game like a gentleman, will keep her counsel, and his own, at least until war be openly declared between them.

But though the danger as regards Leah be tidied over, public feeling is still at white heat against Danton. I have before said that this out-at-elbows medical student is no favourite with what may be called the titled people of the house. Mrs. Amiral Tomson, Madame la Comtesse de Miramion, Churchwarden Pettingall (erewhile fraudulent banker's clerk), all dislike him with the bitter dislike such small souls know towards everything in human nature that is beyond *their* comprehension. A man who has abandoned the Church of England, and a family living in the Church of England, who

attends sick theatre people for nothing, who smokes cigarettes in the salon, sings French love songs on Sunday, wears threadbare coats, and gives his money away like a prince. . . . What should these good old Pharisees feel but horror against a reprobate so utterly outside the pale of their salvation!

"I remarked that M. Danton dined at home to-day," says the Comtesse, dexterously choosing a quiet moment for the insertion of her pin-point. "It is not often we are favoured with M. Danton's society on a Sunday."

"I wish we had more of his society at all times," says Lord Stair. "I am sure there are very excellent qualities in M. Danton, if one could only get to know him better."

Never was the damnation of faint praise more effectual. Everybody gives a shake of the head and looks dubious; even Miss Smith coughs mournfully. Old Major Macnamurdo, meekest, least malicious of

mankind, observes that he has long held one opinion on the subject, which is—that M. Danton is his own enemy. Major Macnamurdo would not mind telling the young man the same thing to his face—his own worst enemy.

“Whenever other excuses are wanting for the palliation of error, we are accustomed to hear the same sophistry advanced.” Thus speaks Mr. Pettingall, in his biggest didactics. “Unfortunately, Sir, when a man is his own enemy, he is the enemy, nine times out of ten, of society at large, and of those laws—ahem!—those fundamental moral laws by which society is held together, and the welfare of its members generally secured.”

There is a little pause, as when a preacher comes to “Thirdly” in his sermon. Then, “I have never,” Lord Stair remarks—“pardon me if I seem to differ from you, Mr. Pettingall—but I have never really heard of any authentic instance in which M. Danton

has transgressed the Decalogue. I respect the absent too much," adds Lord Stair, "to defend them. Still, I am an enemy to vague accusations. With what particular sin is M. Danton charged?"

"It might be more appropriate to ask, with what is M. Danton not charged?" Mr. Pettingall here lowers his voice, in deference, it may be assumed, to Leah's youth and innocence. "Why, you, yourself, my lord, must have seen the class of persons with whom he unblushingly appears in public." Oh, Mr. Pettingall! With what class of persons does my lord appear, in public and otherwise—unblushingly always? "I regret to have to say these things in our good Miss Smith's presence, but both she and our worthy Madame are aware of my views on this point. M. Danton is not a person whose moral character will bear investigation."

The tone of Mr. Pettingall's voice, the

whole expression of his face, betray the scandal-monger possessed of a secret—the scandal-monger possessed of a secret that his soul burns to divulge!

"I have never analysed the cause of my feelings," remarks Colonel Pascal, pulling down one long whisker until he can inspect its quality out of the corners of his eyes, "but from the first moment Monsieur—um—ah—Danton and I met, we—well, we did not love each other. A case simply of Mr. Fell, I suppose. Elective antipathy, don't they call it?"

"And yet he really is gifted," simpers the little old Comtesse. "I declare that *ut de poitrine* makes me forget all my prejudices—and I am very prejudiced. A man who outrages the *bienséances* as M. Danton does, is a source of constant trial to one's nerves."

"A pity he don't display his talents on the stage, the proper place for them,"

remarks Mrs. Amiral Tomson, in her grand bassoon. "I heard him *bravouraring* as I put on my bonnet this afternoon, and I could not help thinking, on a Sunday especially, the performance was rather theatrical for a house like this—a house that advertises a Protestant partner in 'Bradshaw!' What do you say, Miss Pascal?"

"I say," cries Leah, raising her eyes with a sudden glitter in their yellow depths, "that I abhor the practice of stabbing in the dark, and despise the assassins who practise it! Accuse M. Danton of any sin, any crime you like, all of you; but do it openly, when he is present. Give him a chance of self-defence."

"You speak warmly, young lady," says old Mr. Pettingall; but he does not look at her. He stands, his back to the fireplace, his face upturned to Madame's grand gilt-and-plaster chandelier. "It is, however, possible to understand—it is really quite

possible to understand how a person like this M. Danton may exercise an influence over young and imaginative minds. The more reason, perhaps"—this as in half-soliloquy—"why it becomes a duty to let him be known, henceforth, under his true colours."

Miss Smith, who up to the present moment has remained silent and downcast, now jumps up from her chair. "I should be glad if you will say nothing further against M. Danton, Sir. His private life, we know, has been unfortunate, but through no crime of his. M. Danton is the friend of all who ever need help. You, who have lived here so long, Mr. Pettingall, must know that as well as I do. His purse, his time, are at the call of every distressed English person in Paris, of every beggar in the street. But for us—for Madame Bonchrétien and me—he would leave himself without a sou in the world, without a

coat to wear. M. Danton is the most noble, the most generous—”

Miss Smith stops short, with a moistened forehead, with quivering lips. After all, the right kind of woman's heart beats in *cette pauvre Smeet's* breast! Traduce her friend, and you will see of what materials she is made. Bonchrétien never speaks ill of any client; but then she never offends one. Miss Smith would quarrel with the whole connection of the house sooner than listen quietly to a word in dispraise of Danton.

“It is not to be supposed that M. Danton is devoid of every good quality.” But it is evident from Mr. Pettingall's tone that he makes this admission under protest. “That he enjoys the esteem of Madame, and yourself, says much—for your own excellent hearts, at least. And I am quite ready to admit that he possesses the showy habit of indiscriminate almsgiving, wrongly termed

charity. Unhappily, my dear Madame, we know—all experience teaches us—that habits of this kind may exist in the same individual, side by side with the very gravest social laxity. Every one present is not aware probably, *ahem—ah!*”——

How he enjoys his task; how lovingly, lingeringly, the words cling to his lips.

“All the members of our little circle are not aware, probably, of the lamentable circumstances of M. Danton’s private life?”

“I think most of us know to what you allude, Sir,” says Miss Smith. “To Madame Bonchrétien and myself, M. Danton has never made a secret of his misfortunes.”

“But from society at large he keeps them hidden dark enough!” cries Mrs. Tomson. “However, we will have no more of these wolves in sheep’s clothing. Mr. Pettingall, by my advice, is going to make the truth known publicly. You received a letter, Mr. Pettingall, some few weeks ago?”

"From the hand of an unknown female in London." Mr. Pettingall drops his voice to the proper regulation pitch of malice, and general attention grows profound. Even Lord Stair (who knows the whole story beforehand), even Colonel Pascal condescend to become interested.

"A letter from an unknown female, addressed to the clergyman or churchwardens of our Protestant church, and calling on them in the interests of humanity to ascertain if a person named Eugene Danton was still living, or could be traced, in Paris. Mysterious, inscrutable are the ways of Providence," adds old Tartuffe, with stereotyped uplifting of the eyebrows. "Not only was the person sought to be traced—Eugene Danton and myself resided, as you all know, under the same roof!"

"And the letter was from one of M. Danton's old loves, of course?" suggests Lord Stair, cheerfully. "The Nemesis of

some fatal grande passion. Ah, Miss Pascal, when you are ten years older, you will know more about that subject than you do now."

Leah is sitting rigid and silent; her face pale, but absolutely, unnaturally composed; not a movement of her hands, not a quiver of lip or eyelid betraying her.

At Lord Stair's remark she looks up with a smile. "When I am ten years older, I shall probably think, as I do now, Lord Stair, that grandes passions and everything belonging to them are a mistake. That kind of Nemesis, at all events, is not likely to trouble me."

"The writer of the letter," proceeds Mr. Pettingall, "was a woman who had the most sacred of all claims upon M. Danton, and who, it seems, evinced sufficient sense of duty to desire a reconciliation with him. Had it not been so I should have stirred no further in the matter. As regards the truth

of what she stated—you, Miss Smith, and Madame Bonchrétien, were present when I placed the communication in M. Danton's hands. You are aware that he did not attempt to deny the validity of the writer's claim upon him?"

"M. Danton denied nothing," exclaims poor little Smith. "He started for London that same night, as you must well remember, Sir."

"And, we may presume, found the person of whom he was in search? M. Danton has volunteered no confidence to me since his return, and I really do not feel sufficiently intimate with him to solicit it."

"Yes, he found her." And now Miss Smith keeps her eyes steadily fixed on Leah Pascal. She would go through fire and water to gratify the smallest whim of Danton's, but does not flinch from striking a death-blow at Danton's love. "On the first evening of his return, M. Danton told me thus

much, and gave me leave, if there were need, to repeat it. He found the person who desired reconciliation with him in London. And she was well."

"And the person was ——?" Lord Stair asks the question, yet he turns away from Leah as he does so. He is cruel, but with a man's, not a woman's cruelty, and shrinks from looking upon the girl's blanched face. "You may as well let us have the story in its integrity, Mr. Pettingall. The mysterious lady who sought reconciliation with M. Danton was ——?"

"M. Danton's *wife*, my lord."





